

May 2007

The Desired Outcome

This Month: When your job feels impossible

In this issue:

- Your Business: Making progress when everyone around you is being stupid >>
- Your People: How to inspire your employees when even you are discouraged >>
- Your Publicity: Standing out when your hard work goes unnoticed? >>
- Your Life: Ideas for coping with being overwhelmed? >>



YOUR BUSINESS

Making progress when everyone around you is being stupid.

Let's start with disappointing performance of bosses: not making decisions, not providing a strategy, not fixing organization problems, not supporting you in general. Or ... there's partners not delivering, and it becomes your fault, budgets being cut without expectations being cut, imposed re-organizations, unreasonable corporate regulations.... I'm not trying to come up with a complete list because it would just be too depressing!

So what's your list? And what will you do about it?

Whatever it is you are faced with, your possible reactions are: Fight, Flee, or Freeze. This is biological. Freeze is not an option, though it is always a temptation. If you flee, make sure you do it with intention and style - but that's not what I'm here to talk about at this point.

So if you decide to fight....

There is no excuse for not delivering results. (even though there are those hundred things that are in your way) Circumstances no matter how real, do not make up for a lack of results. There is no magic answer to make all the annoying stuff go away. In fact one of my key points to new managers is that

"your job is to do both what your job description says it is, and to deal with all the crap that gets in the way of your doing what your job is".

And the higher you go, the more crap there is. So you need to find a strategy for coping that will work for you, and get busy.

Here are 4 techniques that I have employed at the low points in my career. And in my case, I often did these in order...

1. **Victim time**

It's easy to say, "no excuses", results only -- but sometimes you just get tired and need a break from being positive and constructive. This is called being human. Here's how to use "Victim Time".

Depending on the size of the pile, I pick a bounded time period. Sometimes it's an hour, sometimes it's a day. Sometimes it's a week. But the important thing is that it's bounded. Find someone you can whine to (not in your org), write in your journal, focus on everything that's wrong, eat a gallon of ice cream, and then be done with it. Just get it out of your system. There is no upside (especially to you) to staying pissed off about your job for weeks or months (or years).

2. **Parallel Universe**

When my job would feel extra-impossible, I would take myself through this exercise which I call the "Parallel Universe". Here's how it goes. If there were a parallel universe, and everything was exactly the same, except that there was someone, more capable, smarter, more experienced, more connected, taller, more fit, and with better hair, in my role instead of me, what would THEY do?

I find this a very productive shock to the system and it always yields a few good ideas.

3. **Make progress on one "impossible" thing.**

In this sea of complexity and dead ends, obstacles, etc., remember that nothing feels better than making forward progress. Find one thing that you can impact, get your desired outcome very clearly defined, and execute with great intention. Then move on to the next one. The whole mess will still be there next month so don't try to fix it all at once.

4. **There's more time than you think**

Don't let yourself be forced into thinking that the crisis is so urgent that there isn't time to work on it. Just start working on it. If you have a week and it will take a month, I guarantee that if you don't work on it, and the month goes by, it will still be an urgent crisis, and you'll be wishing you had started a month ago. Soooooo many organizations make this mistake. Don't freeze instead of fight. Prioritize and Do It! -- time will be OK.

[Add a comment](#)

[Back to top >>](#)

YOUR PEOPLE

How to inspire your employees when even you are discouraged.

I have been in situations where things are not going well, and my boss just wasn't helping. In fact, sometimes my bosses were so poorly regarded by the whole organization that I almost felt that supporting them showed a lack of credibility on my part.

You must resist this urge... There is no upside to badmouthing your boss to your team. I will talk more about this in future issues, for now, suffice it to say, you can't win against your boss. You can also read another article on the site called [You can't blame your failure on the fact that your boss is stupid.](#)

And remember, you are being watched. If you are a manager -- you are a hot topic of discussion over numerous family dinner tables. What you say and do, and don't say and don't do, will be replayed over and over again in your team's circle of family and friends.

There are a few DO's and Don'ts when it comes to inspiring your team in a bad situation...

DO: Be calm, strong, confident no matter how bad it seems. If not you will have problems erupting below that will be far more damaging than the ones from above and around (because these will be your fault)

DON'T: Complain downward - EVER, and never signal crisis or panic. If you do you will have the problems you are already dealing with, and then a whole new generation of problems that your team didn't realize they should worry about too.

DO: If you need to expose issues to your team always do it in a constructive way where you say, 1. this is the issue, 2. this is the desired outcome, 3. this is what we are going to do about it.

DO: Lead!! It is never the wrong choice to be positive and to lead. I don't mean to ignore or bury real problems, but in your demeanor, it is never the wrong choice to be positive and to lead - Never.

DO: Keep behaving with great intention. When things are challenging it is more important than ever to develop a very intentional focus on the desired outcome and communicate it. What is it? What needs to be done to get there? and what will we do today, tomorrow and next week to make progress?

Add a comment

[Back to top >>](#)

YOUR PUBLICITY

Standing out when your work goes unnoticed.

Small Business Owners reading this rejoice! You don't have this problem....

One of the most frustrating things is when you have one of those jobs where you need to keep everything running smoothly, and you DO -- and therefore, no one notices.... And THEN, one of your peers takes his eye off the ball, a crisis ensues -- a full five alarm fire, which EVERYONE notices, and then they finally wake up and fix it with great drama and flourish. The crowd cheers. UGH!!! You have been diligent and faithfully and successfully avoiding all such crisis, and the person who screws up gets all the recognition.

I'm sorry to say, you're never going to fix the other person, and it's never going to be fair. You need to find a way to stand out, while you keep doing your great and invisible job. There are some people who are addicted to crises. Don't be one of them. But recognize that if you do you take the high road, there will be many instances when your good work doesn't stand on its own...

There are two very good ways to make the value of what you are doing clear to your stakeholders.

1. **Make your process visible.**

Find a way (in a brief form) to communicate all the things you do that are going right, and expose the "so what's". For example, if you are responsible for a product release, create a monthly report which shows performance against a timeline, problems that have been solved or avoided, opportunities that have been realized, etc.

Deliver it regularly to your boss and peers, and any other stakeholders. But make sure to make it BRIEF and useful - try to get it on one page. Long status reports only make matters worse and make people who already don't recognize your contribution wonder why you have so much time to write reports.

2. **Hold a review meeting.**

Once a quarter, hold a review meeting for your boss and stakeholders outside your organization. Make this relevant to them AND use the meeting to get some work done. Be very clear about the desired outcome for your program and for the meeting. For example, you may have a few issues in your program that are just not working, but they are larger than life so you're a bit stuck.

Your desired outcome for a quarterly review meeting might be to: Briefly report progress, identify potential risks and action plans and get support on one issue that is proving to be a block.

Now your review meeting will do the necessary duty to your career management, as well as help solve a real problem in your project - and show you as someone who uses meeting time efficiently and for action.

Add a comment

[Back to top >>](#)

YOUR LIFE

Ideas for coping with being overwhelmed.

Coping

One of the topics I coach more people on than almost anything else is Coping. You need to recognize that coping is an achievement in itself that distinguishes effective managers from un-promote-able ones. Your management is always perceiving what you "can handle". Show them that you can carry a heavy load without freaking out.

Three Lists for Sanity

Here's a constructive way to discuss an overwhelming workload with your manager. . Make three lists: (these should all be written in "desired outcome" form, not just activities)

1. Everything you are doing
2. Everything people think you are, or should be doing, but are not getting done
3. 3 Important things you have identified, that are not getting worked on.

Talk with your manager, show him the lists, and ask if he agrees with the priorities. Invite him to make trades from list to list. There is always too much work and never enough resources. This approach lets you capture some sanity just by getting it all down in one place, as well as often results in a clarified set of priorities which is more do-able. This is also a good and necessary first step to the discussion of adding resources. This approach will also score you points in the "coping" area, as you have shown yourself to have your arms around a large scope of work -- and you are still standing.

Your Work, Your Family, and You

Lastly, remember that everyone needs to spend some time on: Your Work, Your Family, and Yourself. If any one of these is zeroed out, you will feel overwhelmed. I won't go into the psychology of it, but that's the way it is -- you can look it up.

If you spend zero time on work, they stop paying you... so it's usually one or both of the other two that suffer. It may seem un-intuitive that if you don't have time for yourself or your family, that adding a task to do so will only make matters worse, but the opposite is true.

Even if it's an hour week, or 15 minutes a day, find something that will register as non-zero quality time for yourself or your family, and you will note the feeling of overwhelm beginning to subside.

Add a comment

[Back to top >>](#)

I'd like to hear from you!

I would welcome your feedback and input about stupid and frustrating situations you have encountered and how you have coped with, and overcome them. Send me your stories at patty@azzarellogroup.com, and please let me know if it's OK to use your examples in future articles.

I hope you have found a few useful ideas that you can apply right away to start building core value in your career and business. Contact me if you have feedback, or if I can help you with a mentoring program or workshop for you or your organization

Contact me:

**If you were sent this issue of
The Desired Outcome by a friend,
Sign up now,
to get your own copy each month.**

About Patty

Patty Azzarello was the youngest general manager at HP ever at the age of 33. She ran a \$1B software business at the age of 35 and was a CEO for the first time at the age of 38. Patty is known for her personal leadership qualities, her straightforward and practical manner, and her genuine interest in making a real connection with people to help them to advance their career and business, and to find ways to enjoy their life more.

More About Patty

Patty Azzarello is the CEO of Azzarello Group, www.AzzarelloGroup.com a unique services organization focused on helping business leaders actually get done what they want to do, and get a bigger payoff from their hard work. Azzarello Group delivers practical, experience-based tools to business leaders, through products and services including articles, e-books, mentoring programs, executive coaching, public speaking, small business retreats, and business execution workshops.

[Back to top >>](#)

All materials Copyright Azzarello Group, Inc. 2007
[Logout](#) | [Manage Account](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)