




# **SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR DIFFICULT ENVIRONMENTS**

**What I Should Have Learned  
in B-School – and Didn't**

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# What We'll Talk About

- What qualifies a work environment or a project as “difficult”?
- What would surviving—even thriving—look like?
- Strategies



# Profile of a Difficult Environment

- Lack of safety, personal and interpersonal
- Unrealistic expectations
- Unproductive conflict, often escalating
- Malaise
- Internal competitiveness
- General avoidance of personal responsibility for words and actions
- Punish viciously for mistakes



# Thriving on Chaos


- Sense of well-being
- “I’m a hero.”
- Battlefield promotions
- Extremely rapid learning



# Surviving and Thriving

Surviving is:

- Nobody dies.
- Nobody melts down.
- You're strong, not tough.
- You do learn something.
- You find satisfaction in your work.
- You're proud of your contribution.



Let's get beyond *surviving*, shall we?



# Control

Self control is the only kind of control we ever really have.

That's hard enough to maintain.



# So, You're In a Tough Spot: Survival Skills

- Perceiving and building trust
- Evaluating intensity
- Personal goal setting
- Maintaining personal sovereignty
- Knowing when to leave:
  - Grace under pressure, or a graceful exit






# Lack of Safety

- How do we know when we're safe?
  - Gossip is not tolerated.
  - Credit is given for both errors and successes.
  - Errors are not personalized and used for counting coup.
  - The elements of trust are present.
- Strategy: look for and manifest the elements of trust.



# Elements of Trust

- Trust is built by:
  - A history of integrity
  - Reliability
  - Responsiveness
  - Perception of empathy
- Virtual trust building must be done consciously and is more fragile than trust in face-to-face relationships.




# Business is Not War

- “We’re not curing cancer here.”
- Business is not war, it’s wealth creation.
- *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* - Chris Hedges
- Strategy: Look up and out.



# Looking Up and Out

- Is work your world?
  - Workaholics are happy; most people who know them are not.
- What says who you are?
- Professional development
  - You are here.



# The Object of the Game

- Is intensity the object of the game?
- Take your breaks on Wednesdays.
- Strategy: Monitor for unproductive intensity.



## Leonardo's Perspective

*Every now and then go away, have a little relaxation, for when you come back to your work your judgment will be surer; since to remain constantly at work will cause you to lose power of judgment . . .*

*Go some distance away because then the work appears smaller, and more of it can be taken in at a glance, and a lack of harmony or proportion is more readily seen.*

- Leonardo da Vinci



# Keep Your Eye on Your Goals

- I choose.
- Be loosely coupled and highly cohesive.
- Maintain personal sovereignty.
  - What will make my \_\_\_\_\_ feel awful?



# Personal Sovereignty

- The ability to choose from what is available in order to be intentional about your life.
- You cannot be intentional unless you know what you want.
- If you don't know what you want, mark time until you do.





# Responsibility and Mistakes

- “It takes about a year for them to figure out it’s okay to make mistakes.”
- Try to get information about what’s to be learned.
- If you don’t want to learn this lesson, realize it. You can opt out. Refer to your goals and personal sovereignty.



# Staying or Leaving with Grace

- Grace is:
  1. Seemingly effortless beauty or charm of movement, form, or proportion.
  2. A characteristic or quality pleasing for its charm or refinement.
  3. A sense of fitness or propriety.
    - A disposition to be generous or helpful; goodwill.
    - Mercy; clemency.
- Develop an exit strategy as an exercise in readiness. Do a risk analysis and mitigation plan.



# Take Home

- Perceiving and building trust
- Evaluating and monitoring intensity
- Personal goal setting for this job, your life, and your career
- Maintaining personal sovereignty
- Knowing when to leave:
  - Grace under pressure, or a graceful exit.



Questions?  
Comments?  
Stories?

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