

Self motivation and personal resource management

Crisis can be a productive state. You simply have to remove the overtone of **catastrophe**. (Max Frisch)

Crisis is the noun from of the Greek verb *krínein*, meaning "separate," "distinguish," and "decide." It refers to a "decisive moment," "turning point" (Merriam-Webster) and means "an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is pending" (Merriam-Webster). However, it can often be difficult to notice that a turning point is involved until the crisis has passed.

If developments takes a persistently negative course, people use the term **catastrophe** (collapse, ruin). A catastrophe is thus a "turn downwards into ruin." Since the turning point can take you one way or the other, it is impossible to know in the leadup to the turning point which way developments will go, as both possibilities are contained within it. The result is a feeling of helplessness, a state which cannot be removed by any existing problem-solving model or approach. All attempts at advice are futile and advisers are no use. Instead every word of advice, no matter how well intended, and every attempt at a solution simply underlines the impression of hopelessness.

An example of a situation like this is described in the fairytale "Mother Hulda," also known as "Frau Holle." The heroine of the fairytale is working on her life. She spins the thread of her life with such intensity that her fingers bleed. She tries to remove this contamination of her life by dipping the spindle in the well to clean it, but she loses hold of the spindle and it falls into the well. She loses control over her life. She doesn't know what she should do anymore or how things can go on. An unbearable situation, one which pushes her even so far as to turn in her desperation to her stepmother, who was never very likely to do anything good for her. Here too she receives no help, but rather the instruction to leap into the well if she wants to get her life back. Which seems like heartless advice. At the height of her desperation, there seems to be no other option but to actually leap into the well, since things are evidently completely hopeless; which would normally be a fairly reliable way of taking your own life.

This feeling of hopelessness is more than just an "overtone of catastrophe"; the feeling of having no other choice and needing to abandon life as you once knew it is characteristic of a crisis, and is what differentiates it from other difficult situations such as: **conflicts**:

- Two different motives/elements/opinions are irreconcilable
- There is a tangible difference between the way things are and the way they should be
- A decision is required

and **dilemmas**:

- Things are being viewed as connected which are not in fact related
- There is an impression that it is impossible to talk about it
- There seems to be no way of ending the situation

Let's return to our heroine in the fairytale. She leaps into the well in despair and loses consciousness. Everything goes black; after a while she wakes up again and with her first breath notices that to her astonishment she is still alive. There is blue sky above her and green meadows around her; the sun is shining. Life goes on and she is still safe and unhurt. A miracle!

The description in the fairytale contains all the elements that characterize a **crisis**:

- Loss of orientation (I no longer know where I actually am)
- Loss of capacity to act (I no longer know what I can/should do)
- Need for change (things cannot remain as they are)

Precise analysis of the situation is necessary because the difficult situations described need to be dealt with in different ways. The first and most vital thing to realize in a crisis according to this definition is: there is no possibility of control. The "black hole" of the well is unavoidable; the feeling of disorientation likewise. In light of that, the term "crisis management" is misleading, suggesting as it does planning and control. A crisis represents a necessary boost to development. Old patterns of behavior and tried and tested problem-solving tools are no longer effective and therefore need to be replaced. A crisis demands that you let go and recognize that new problem-solving options need to be learned and tested. If that were not enough of a challenge, the speed of development in a crisis is not under your control either. You do not know how long the period of "unconsciousness" will last; all you know is that you will wake up again—sometime. To sum up: a crisis has you at its mercy.

This first and most vital realization, before considering resources and options for dealing with the crisis, is just as helpful as it is shocking. It's no use trying to avoid the leap into the well. When you've "lost the thread" and further steps have disappeared into the hole of the well, there is no other option available. A look at the crises of others shows what happens then: things get worse, ultimately leading, without a doubt, to catastrophe. It makes no difference whether the crisis is a personal one, a crisis in a relationship, a crisis in your working life, or crises in organizations or the global economy. When structures become out of date, they need to change, resulting in a "separation" from the old and survivable.

When you come to consider your personal resource management, you should first take a look at crises (turning points) in the course of life, which we as human beings are at the mercy of and which need to be dealt with by every one of us in order to grow both within and without. Such considerations supply the foundation of personal resource management, because experiences from one crisis can be applied to another. There are different models for the personal development of human beings; the most popular refers to the assumption that a fundamental change in a person is needed every seven years, a change which takes place more or less in the manner of a crisis.

From puberty onwards, every person has experience of crises, to a greater or lesser degree of intensity. A vital turning point in adult life is the "midlife crisis" around the fortieth birthday mark, which calls into question your life up to that point. *C.G. Jung* described this turning point in this way: "In the afternoon of life, you cannot sing the same song that you sang in the morning." Then at the latest you are forced to consciously come to terms with critical changes, and a refusal to do so carries grave consequences with it. In the process it becomes clear how closely your life has been

built around your own particular needs. The more attention and priority was given to those, the less violent the crises will be.

Therefore the first challenge in personal resource management is to understand your own needs. With this question, resource management is addressing far more than just one's conscious personality. When crises occur repeatedly and in relatively quick succession, then numerous needs have been neglected and your conscious perception of your self and your environment should be examined. A crisis can thus make it necessary to correct one's self-perception. Such a correction will also integrate the new realizations that result from the next steps.

Among the opportunities which a "stocktake" offers is that of working out what resources you have and realizing that a person needs a "gas station" to maintain resources and renew resources that have been used up. The fairytale puts it like this:

And she walked on through the meadow until she came to a baker's oven that was full of bread; and the bread called out to her: "Oh, take me out, take me out, or I shall burn; I am baked enough already!" Then she drew near, and with the baker's peel she took out all the loaves one after the other.

The loaves of bread are the successes achieved in the course of life. Putting these together and focusing on them is the first step. The second step is to arrange them so that they can be well presented at the next opportunity.

And she went farther on till she came to a tree weighed down with apples, and it called out to her: "Oh, shake me, shake me, we apples are all of us ripe!" Then she shook the tree until the apples fell like rain, and she shook until there were no more to fall; and when she had gathered them together in a heap, she went on farther.

The apple is the fruit of knowledge – but also the reason why paradise was lost. Resource management involves working out how much knowledge you have already gained and what experiences you can draw on. At this point it is also crucial to sort the "good" apples from the "bad": those notions which don't fit well with the others, which rob the others of their bite and freshness. A different image: It is also important to recognize that knowledge "loses" something over time. A nice way to picture this is a room filled with balloons, which represent knowledge. Little by little, the balloons lose their air, without anyone noticing.

The third step leads inwards, into the subconscious. The first two steps are relatively easy to perform by oneself, without assistance; with the third, we often require help, because here we need to plumb depths of the personality which can be difficult to acknowledge, as they are not among those aspects of the self which we like to put on display – often these are the very features of our personality that we would most like to get rid of.

... she came to a little house, and an old woman was peeping out of it, but she had a big nose and such sharp teeth that the girl was terrified and about to run away, only the old woman called her back. "What are you afraid of, my dear child? Come and live with me, and if you do the housework well and orderly, things shall go well with you. You must take great pains to make my bed well, and shake it up thoroughly, so that

the feathers fly about, and then in the world it snows, for I am Mother Hulda." As the old woman spoke so kindly, the girl took courage, consented, and went to her work. She did everything to the old woman's satisfaction, and always shook the bed so that the feathers flew about like snowflakes: and so she led a good life, had never a cross word, but boiled and roast meat every day.

Mother Hulda (Frau Holle) is an earth spirit, the guardian of hell. Every crisis feels at times like you are going through hell. However, contrary to the Christian image of it, the underworld contains more than just despair. There is work. The girl's work in the house symbolizes work in one's inner self. This mucking out and cleaning up, airing and shaking is also needed in a person in order to get through a crisis productively and fruitfully. Fear and anxiety are not what is needed. The bed of the old wise woman symbolizes the place of the inner self and its connection to the collective unconscious (C.G. Jung). Building up this connection helps the "outer world" to heal. It then snows in the fairytale: The winter, the time of renewal, gives the outer world the rest that is necessary to renew its strength. Translated, that refers to the intensive inner work required in a crisis.

As mentioned above, it is not always possible to do all this work alone, so it is a good idea to have somebody to accompany you through a crisis. In the fairytale, Mother Hulda supports the girl, spurring her along in the process of change while otherwise remaining in the background and providing the necessary atmosphere of security. In crisis situations too, it is helpful to be accompanied – even if the first step in that direction and the initial contact might be just as alarming as with Mother Hulda. Not every coach or consultant is going look like Mother Hulda, but the qualities in that description are certainly very helpful in the process:

- A big nose = good at sniffing things out
- Sharp teeth = bite, and knowledge of how to utilize aggression.

The girl's life with Mother Hulda also illustrates that intensively working on your own resources and examining your inner self can be quite pleasant once you overcome your initial fear.

When she had lived a long time with Mother Hulda, she began to feel sad, not knowing herself what ailed her; at last she began to think she must be homesick; and although she was a thousand times better off than at home where she was, yet she had a great longing to go home. At last she said to her mistress: "I am homesick, and although I am very well off here, I cannot stay any longer; I must go back to my own home." Mother Hulda answered: "It pleases me well that you should wish to go home, and, as you have served me faithfully, I will undertake to send you there!" She took her by the hand and led her to a large door. The door was opened, and as she was passing through it there fell upon her a heavy shower of gold, and the gold hung all about her, so that she was covered with it. "All this is yours, because you have been so industrious," said Mother Hulda; and, besides that, she returned to her her spindle, the very same that she had dropped in the well. And then the door was shut again, and the girl found herself back again in the world, not far from her mother's house; and as she passed through the yard the cock stood on the top of the well and cried: "Cock-a-doodle doo! Our golden girl has come home too!" Then she went in to her mother, and as she had returned covered with gold she was well received by both mother and sister.

The end of the first part depicts the end of the crisis and the reward promised by the completion of crisis work. Covered in gold and transformed in the eyes of the world, the heroine returns, and her difficult relationship with her stepmother and sister is changed fundamentally. That is another important message: working on yourself changes your relationships with others.

The fairytale shows that these three steps have to be completed before you can return from the crisis to your relationships, "covered in gold" i.e. noticeably changed, clearly for the better; and those relationships will then respond to that change and improve in turn. What happens if somebody tries to get out of this inner work is depicted in the second part of the fairytale, which ends in misfortune – in other words in catastrophe.

So the girl related all her history, and what had happened to her, and when the mother heard how she came to have such great riches she began to wish that her ugly and idle daughter might have the same good fortune. So she had to sit by the well and spin; and in order to make her spindle bloody she put her hand into the thorn hedge. Then she threw the spindle into the well, and leapt in herself. She found herself, like her sister, in the beautiful meadow, and followed the same path, and when she came to the baker's oven, the bread cried out: "Oh, take me out, or I shall burn; I am baked enough already!" But the lazy-bones answered: "I have no desire to black my hands," and went on farther. Soon she came to the apple-tree, who called out: "Oh, shake me, shake me, we apples are all of us ripe!" But she answered: "That is all very fine; suppose one of you should fall on my head," and went on farther.

When she came to Mother Hulda's house she did not feel afraid, as she knew beforehand of her great teeth, and entered into her service at once. The first day she put her hand well to the work, and was industrious, and did everything Mother Hulda bade her, because of the gold she expected; but the second day she began to be idle, and the third day still more so, so that she would not get up in the morning. Neither did she make Mother Hulda's bed as it ought to have been made, and did not shake it for the feathers to fly about. So that Mother Hulda soon grew tired of her, and gave her notice, at which the lazy thing was well pleased, and thought that now the shower of gold was coming; and indeed Mother Hulda led her to the door, but as she stood in the doorway, instead of the shower of gold a great kettle full of pitch was emptied over her. "That is the reward for your service," said Mother Hulda, and shut the door. So the lazy girl came home all covered with pitch, and the cock on the top of the well seeing her, cried: "Cock-a-doodle doo! Our dirty girl has come home too!" And the pitch remained sticking to her fast, and never, as long as she lived, could it be got off.

That alone should be motivation enough to face up to a crisis and deal with it. Because when a crisis calls your attention to necessary changes that cannot be avoided, the outcome should be a positive one. Nobody wants to end up tarred with misfortune. To prevent that, a crisis should always be used as a time for looking inwards and for renewal. Moreover, it is always very helpful to have somebody accompany you along the path, because there are a number of points where you can lose your way – a difficulty which is described in other fairytales.

The other necessary changes in and after a crisis are not depicted in the fairytale. After her return, the golden girl will surely not slip back into her old role of serving girl, because it no longer fits her. Once you have made it through the crisis, you will need to externalize your new self-perception as altered self-awareness and self-confidence, and enter into discussion with people in various contexts about changes in roles and relationships. Changes in behavior will also result, which will need to be communicated accordingly. Here too it is helpful to have an experienced coach by your side, with whom each individual step can be checked for internal consistency. In the event of deeper crises, therapy is advisable.

There is a time and a season for everything in life, and if the situation in which you find yourself has an overtone of catastrophe but has not developed its own dynamic, it is not – yet – a crisis. Even when the “dirty” girl leapt into the well and had every opportunity, she still did not have the motivation to change anything. That is another message from the fairytale: even Mother Hulda cannot do a thing without your own action.

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