

Are you behaving like a victim, survivor or navigator?

The recent Congressional debate over the debt ceiling had many Americans feeling leadership has become a bygone value.

That concern pervades the workplace, too, according to a recent study by Maritz Research (and others like it). The study found that only 14 percent of American workers trust senior management. Twenty-five percent of the employees surveyed said that they have less trust in management than they did last year and only 10 percent trust management to make decisions good enough to turn their companies around.

These findings should disturb any business leader for at least two reasons, one self-centered, one altruistic: cynical workers are less productive and distrusting workers are stressed workers in pain.

In this column, I want to address what options are available to an employee when you don't trust management, you can't afford to quit your job, and you can't control the actions of senior management (who can?). I wrote a book recently in which I spell out those choices. Its title reveals the dilemma: "Victim, Survivor, or Navigator? Choosing a Response to Workplace Change."

I developed this model in a previous recession, back in the days when management would pay people to teach courses on stress management for their harried workers. They don't do this much anymore. It had occurred to me that at any point in life, one could behave like a victim, a survivor, or a navigator. This choice, usually unconscious, has profound effects on one's emotional and physical health as well as one's productivity.

Many people are now doing the work of three former employees. They may have had a succession of bosses they don't trust in the last two years. And they know their company is not out of the woods yet despite everyone's hard work. What does a body do? React as a victim? Grin and bear it like a survivor? Or keep your wits about you and grow despite the difficulties, i.e., be a navigator.

If you take the easy way out, you function like a victim, complaining, dragging your feet, getting consumed by your anger or fear. You live in the FIGHT or FLIGHT mode.

If you're like most people, you function in survivor mode, working your tail off to continue to be acceptable to those making layoff decisions, but hating yourself for it. You're in the GET TIGHT mode trying hard not to rock the boat.

Finally, you can do what comes least naturally to most of us and that requires the most finesse: you find ways to get and stay in navigator mode, realizing that no amount of anger, fear, posturing, or pretending will help you stay true to yourself.

Here's how to tell which mode you're in most of the time: Ask yourself, "What is it like to be me right now?" Ask yourself what your feelings are. Are you feeling mostly angry or defeated (victim mode)? Perhaps you're hoping for the best but planning for the worst (survivor mode). Maybe, despite the difficulties, you feel a kernel of confidence inside you that you



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can nurture into feelings of excitement and optimism (navigator mode).

Even simpler, you could ask yourself which of the following bumper stickers you can most imagine being on your car right now; I've seen them all:

On my way to work: Please kill me (Victim).

Hoping for the best; planning for the worst (Survivor).


Life is an exciting adventure. Bring on the challenges (Navigator).

In subsequent columns, I will answer two questions: If you find yourself in vic-

tim or survivor mode and you want to get into navigator mode, what do you do? What if you're a manager and you want to help your direct reports get and stay in the navigator mode?

For now, take a deep breath. Take another. Take another. (Did I say breathe out?) Take another. Take another.


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