

Survive or Thrive: It's Your Choice

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

The U.S. economy is experiencing a rough patch right now, and organizations in all sectors are faced with the challenges of weathering the storm. While the media focus on stories about how people and organizations are suffering financially and otherwise (which many are), the fact remains that everything is not doom and gloom. There are businesses that are doing just fine, and opportunities abound for those who seek them. Whichever scenario fits your situation, my contention is that you have the ability to optimize your quality of life, and that of your organization, by choosing how you view your circumstances. Though there are things we are unable to control, we *can* control how we perceive our respective situations. How we view ourselves and the world around us leads us to take actions that shape the quality of our lives. That perception is a choice each of us is free to make at any time.

One way of exercising our option to choose how we view our situation is by paying attention to the questions we ask ourselves and others. Have you ever stopped to consider the importance of your questions? In the Appreciative Inquiry framework, questions are described as “fateful” because they point us in the direction of our search for the answers. Consider this example: which of the two following questions is your organization’s performance management system structured to answer?

1. “What did our employees do wrong during the past year?”
2. “How can we help our employees become fully successful?”

This example illustrates that the questions we ask determine the type of information we seek and the answers we find. In a reactive mode, our questions might focus on weaknesses, obstacles, and subsistence. By way of contrast, in an action mode our questions would seek information about our strengths, our successes, and opportunities.

In times of adversity, many of us react by going into “survival” mode – e.g., cutting back, letting our worst fears run rampant, focusing on problems, feeling overwhelming by the enormity of it all, seeking to eke out an existence until things turn around. What if instead of settling for mere survival, we choose to thrive? Our outlook then changes dramatically – e.g., we see opportunities, we make healthy choices for ourselves and our organizations, we act based on confidence in our ability, and we focus on developing innovative and creative solutions.

The key point is that we can control how we experience every situation, negative and positive, by making affirmative choices that directly affect the quality of our personal lives and our workplace environments. By choosing to focus on the negative and the obstacles before us (real or imagined), our quality of life is dismal. The alternative is to increase the quality of our lives dramatically by exercising our choice to focus on the positive and those things we *can* control and do.

Knowing that we each can choose to survive or to thrive, and that the questions we ask set us up for the answers we will find, what choice will you make today? Send me an e-mail and let me know.

For examples of questions you might want to ask yourself and others, please see *Business Questions for Thriving During Challenging Economic Times* on the Articles page of the Business Alignment Strategies web site. ➔

Pat Lynch, Ph.D., is President of Business Alignment Strategies, Inc., a consulting firm that helps clients optimize business results by aligning people, programs, and processes with organizational goals.