

STYBEL PEABODY & ASSOCIATES, INC.



Maryanne Peabody and Larry Stybel are co-founders of Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

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How to Seize Opportunities in Dangerous Times

Leadership involves finding a balance between failure to spend enough time to think through the implications of problems and overthinking problems to the extent that your solutions arrive too late or are too complex.

Challenge Your Binary Thinking

Emotionally, you may want to turn away from a highly charged idea because you are sensitive to its risks. Sensitivity to risks is a good thing

when you use ordinal logic. If you frame risks using binary logic, however, you may get yourself paralyzed with fear.

Here is an example of framing a problem using binary logic: "If I do not meet next quarter's sales goals, I will be fired." Binary logic looks at the world from an ultra-dramatic perspective of 0/1, win/lose, success/failure.

Ordinal logic frames the same problem from a 0 to 100 percent perspective. For example, "I acknowledge that I may feel unemployable if I get fired from this job. Based on my sense of the job market, however, I think I have a 70 percent chance of finding another job within six months. And there is only a 20 percent chance my employer will not fire me if I fail to meet sales targets this quarter."

Below is another example of binary versus ordinal thinking:

Imagine you are scheduled for surgery. The surgeon walks up to your bed and says, "Don't worry. You will be OK." Now imagine the same situation. This time the surgeon says, "Based on my 15 years' experience in doing these operations and the research about this procedure, there is an 80 percent probability you will regain total movement within six months after this surgery."

Which surgeon's message would you be most likely to trust prior to the operation?

Stop Saying to Yourself, "Stop Thinking Like This!"

Give yourself permission to give in to your negative thoughts on a schedule you determine. Give yourself no more than 15 to 20 minutes to write all your fearful thoughts on the screen or on paper. You will notice that your thoughts are binary. Once you read the thoughts, you can evaluate them using an ordinal (0 to 100 percent probability) framework.

Yelling at yourself for having catastrophic thoughts only increases your tension. Allow your thinking to express itself at a time selected by you.

Change the Channel.

When you are not on your scheduled time to write down your negative thoughts, distract yourself. For example, we encourage our clients to take daily walks with their mobile devices. Use the camera to focus attention on something beautiful or unusual. Can't find anything beautiful on your walk? Take a photo of something ordinary and see if you can edit it to into something extraordinary.

Instead of focusing your attention on how unhappy you are, force yourself to focus on what you are grateful for.

Your Negative Thoughts Come in Waves.

It may feel like you are constantly going over the same catastrophic thoughts. The reality is that your negative thoughts come in waves of 10 to 15 minutes. "What is bad now will be bad forever" is a thought pattern that does not consider that the environment will change, and you will change. Think of your thoughts as a wave of negativity rather than as a certain prediction about your future.

Just because the message comes from your brain does not automatically mean it can or should be trusted. Your brain can produce spam messages. To make an analogy, your computer is a powerful and useful device, yet you know it will also produce spam messages.

As we slowly move towards a post-pandemic economy, you know that the next 12 months will present danger and opportunity. Those leaders who aggressively move towards opportunity while engaging in probabilistic thinking about dangers will be the winners.

For example, one of our client companies manufactures corporate gifts that are used as promotional items at trade shows and industry conferences. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic wiped out trade shows. The company opportunistically took advantage of the pandemic to retool its manufacturing power into producing KN95 masks with the logos of their corporate customers.

Seizing opportunity amid danger can best be done with analog logic.

Companies retain Stybel Peabody & Associates, Inc. when it desires “Smooth Leadership Change When the Stakes are High.”

Core services revolve around (1) Retained Search limited to Board Directors, CEOs, COOs, and CFOs (2) Relationship Management Consultation at this level and (3) Executive Outplacement.

Business leaders wishing a free 30-minute consult can contact:

Maryanne Peabody

Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

peabody@stybelpeabody.com

stybelpeabody.com

boardoptions.com