

## Cross the bridge before you get to it

By Jeff “Chief” Urbaniak  
COLUMNIST (www.AdviceChief.com)

Are you having difficulty managing problems in your life? Are you often knee-deep in mud before you realize what’s going on? Life is challenging with many problems. You can’t eliminate all of them but you can foresee and avoid many of them.

First and foremost, if you find yourself in the midst of an unexpected problem, never panic. Stay calm and quickly assess what’s happening and then initiate damage control. Restore the situation to normal as quickly as possible then evaluate what happened and determine why it happened. In this manner you gain a better understanding and enhance your intuitive senses that may/should alert you of the same or similar problem in the future.

The key to not standing knee-deep in mud is to avoid the mud, either by not walking into it or not letting the mud form. By seeing signs of mud in advance and knowing what causes mud to form, you can take proactive measures to not have a muddy encounter.

Quite often you’ll hear people say: “We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it.” Well, I prefer to tell people to cross the bridge BEFORE they get to it. This

means recognizing and fixing problems in their early stages. Don’t avoid them or postpone dealing with them. Kicking a can down the road doesn’t get rid of it.

When dealing with a problem, your initial objective should be to stop it from reaching gigantic proportions, and your ultimate goal should be to prevent it from rearing its ugly head again. Always be looking for signs and indicators that will give you some insight into a potential problem. This increases your odds of fixing or avoiding it in advance.

Leadership expert John Maxwell tells people to treat problems like the potential trespasser of an Indiana farm who read this sign on a fence post: “If you cross this field, you better do it in 9.8 seconds. The bull can do it in 10 seconds.” Too bad signs for problems are not this clear-cut and obvious. However, almost every problem, though, has a sign somewhere. Find it and read it so you don’t have a disastrous two-tenths of a second!

You can usually recognize problems in the following sequence:

*Sense it before you see it.* This requires intuition on your part. Listen to your gut.

*Begin looking for it and ask questions.* This requires curiosity on

your part--turning things over so you can see what’s under the surface.

*Gather data.* Collect and process information and see if you can form potential meaning in it.

*Share your feelings and findings with trusted colleagues.* This communication could very well validate your feelings and/or the situation at hand.

*Define the problem.* Put it in writing. This enables others to read and understand the problem as well.

*Check your resources.* Evaluate what you have and what you’ll need. Just like a firetruck is ineffective without water, you can’t battle a problem without a vital or necessary resource.

*Make a decision.* Waging war against a problem requires being decisive. Delaying a decision allows the problem to grow or get messy.

So to better manage your problems, remember the mud analogy and strategy: Get out of the mud, get cleaned up, discard the mud, then look for signs of the mud’s existence elsewhere and avoid it or find ways to prevent it from forming. These symbolic steps will reduce your level of frustration as well as eliminate and prevent many of the problems in your life.

~ The End ~