



Dear Chief

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COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: I’m having so much difficulty managing problems in both my professional and personal lives. It seems like I’m always knee-deep in mud before I realize what’s going on. How can I do a better job of foreseeing problems and avoiding them?

KNEE-DEEP IN MUD



DEAR KNEE-DEEP IN MUD: Almost everyone finds themselves in the same predicament as you from time to time, sometimes more often or more severe.

First and foremost, 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, impending 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 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:

Cross the bridge before you get to it

“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 you should try to recognize and fix a problem in its early stages. Don’t avoid it or postpone dealing with it. If a can in the road is a problem, then pick it up and discard it rather than kicking it down the road.

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 it. 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 not all signs for problems aren’t this obvious, telling you exactly what to do before you actually do it. All problems, though, have a sign somewhere. Find it and read it so you don’t have a disastrous .2 of a second!

You can usually recognize a problem 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 get out of the mud, get cleaned up, discard the mud, and then look for signs of the mud’s existence or ways to prevent it from forming. Do these things and I bet you won’t be standing knee-deep in mud very much in the future.



For an opportunity to have your question, issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to www.DearChiefAdvice.com and submit your comments or email them to Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com.