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COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: My boss told me during my last performance review that I need to learn to panic at inappropriate times rather than appropriate times. What the heck does that mean? When did “panicking” become a leadership trait sought after in managers? He also said I tend to lose my composure when the “going gets tough,” which is true, but I seem to always get things figured out in the nick of time. I really don’t get his philosophy.

#### PANIC ATTACK VICTIM



DEAR PANIC ATTACK VICTIM: Your boss is actually right about panicking at inappropriate times. An inappropriate time is not an actual panic situation, but rather a mental drill or exercise that forces you to fully plan for a potentially disastrous scenario.

For instance, if a new national-chain grocery store down the street just launched its grand opening sale, the nearby convenient store owner better already have a sales strategy to compete with it. If not, it’s too late trying to

## Panic in advance

come up with one as customers flock to the bigger and potentially better grocery store.

Imagine a potbellied, nervous, chain smoking salesman pacing back and forth in front of his office building. He’s annoyed to be outside because they won’t let him smoke inside. He’s puffing as hard as he can, anxious about getting back to work.

This guy is focused on solving the urgent problems in his life. And all those problems are about today. He’s not focused one bit on losing weight or giving up cigarettes or understanding how tense he is. He figures that there will be time for that later.

Right now, he needs to panic about the sales numbers that are due tomorrow. He’ll have the time to panic about his health when he’s in the hospital having bypass surgery.

The time to panic about his health, though, is right now while he can still do something about it. Taking action today on a long-term problem is easier, cheaper, more effective, and far less time consuming than waiting for it to become an emergency. The time to panic about his health is today. The time to panic

about the sales numbers was last week.

Why not start panicking in advance? Why not start taking emergency measures while there’s still a chance that those emergency measures will actually accomplish something?

At what point will your product or service become obsolete? Five years? Ten? The time to start panicking about a replacement product or service is now, not when the replacement becomes necessary.

Every organization that gets into trouble quite often falters because it waited too long to do the stuff that should have been done a long time ago. Panic early, not late, and your fire drills will actually pay off. Panic in advance and you stand a much better chance of keeping (rather than losing) your composure when the “going gets tough.”



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