

Avoiding Despair: Six Sure-Fire Ways to Remain Hopeful

The phone rang. I stared at it with anxious anticipation. The call I'd been waiting for would reveal my future with the company. I'd been through several evaluations and interviews to keep my current job. As my heart began racing and sweat beads formed on my brow, I answered the phone.

"Hello, this is Preston."

"Hi. This is Ted. I'm calling to let you know..."

You may have received a similar call if you've ever worked in a corporate environment. And, you've experienced the effects of organizational change – uncertainty, layoffs, or downgraded compensation. I've been through 10 restructures in my career. I liken the process to running for Congress – every two years, you're up for re-election. If you're elected, you begin your next campaign immediately.

The topsy-turvy corporate world can be exasperating and disheartening. It can bring one to utter despair. The challenge is to remain **hopeful**. You might say, "But Preston, I hear all the time that *hope isn't a strategy*." If hope isn't a strategy, what is it?

Hope is a general feeling that some desire will be fulfilled, a promise will be kept, or a better future is on the horizon. Hope provides internal energy, motivation, and courage. I've heard it said that someone can live 40 days without food, four days without water, four minutes without air, and only 4 seconds without hope. [1] Why is hope such a crucial part of life and your well-being? It energizes and inspires you to keep going. Without hope, you will begin to think circumstances will only get worse and give up.

How does someone avoid despair and remain hopeful amid challenging circumstances? Here are six surefire ways.

1. **Pray.** For the Christian, start with connecting with your source of hope, God. Take your concerns to him and seek his guidance.
2. **Don't lose heart.** In tough times, continue believing that you can succeed. Think about your past achievements and recount your strengths. The circumstance doesn't define you. Seek God, and he will strengthen you. Jesus' words provide confidence, "In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world." (John 16:33b – The Message)
3. **Manage Self-Talk.** Did you know our thoughts shape our beliefs and actions? Our challenge is that 8 out of 10 thoughts we have are negative. Stop listening to the lies you tell yourself and focus on your strengths. Replace the lies with the truth. What would happen if you increased the number of positive thoughts to 5 or 6? How? When self-doubt creeps in and I'm experiencing despair, I've found it helpful to pause and say an affirming phrase ten times to myself. It helps change my mindset from negative to positive. For example, instead of saying to yourself, "I'm a weak and unworthy person," say "I'm a strong and worthy person." Or, rather than saying "I can't do anything," say "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Change your "I can't" to "How can I?" Also, set your mind on constructive thoughts. The Bible says, "Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse." (Philippians 4:8 – The Message). If you do these things, you'll win the battle of the mind.
4. **Keep a long-term perspective.** Tough times don't last,

but tough people do. Remind yourself that life is a journey, and challenges are opportunities to grow. The Bible says, “These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There’s far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can’t see now will last forever” (2 Corinthians 4:17–18 – The Message). Keep your head up, look to the horizon, and expect a positive outcome in the long run.

5. **Face reality and take responsibility.** Accept that life can be backbreaking. Then, objectively evaluate your challenging circumstance and define the problem you face. What’s the worst that can happen? What are all of your options? How can you improve upon the worst? Once you answer these questions, take ownership. Embrace the opportunity to change and intentionally determine to grow through the circumstance. Think, “if it’s to be, it’s up to me.” As a person of faith, I prescribe to the thought, “work like it’s up to me and trust God like it’s up to him.”
6. **Plan, act, and persevere.** Once you’ve faced reality, taken responsibility, and determined the best option, be intentional and go for it. Put a plan together. Develop goals and move in the direction you’ve chosen. Look for quick wins and build momentum. Above all else, never give up. If you plan, act, and persevere, you’ll begin to experience success. The road ahead will be different than you expected, harder than you anticipated, and potentially more rewarding than you imagined. One of my mentors, John Maxwell, says, “Everything worthwhile is uphill.”

Back to my story... I picked up the phone and said, “Hello, this is Preston.”

“Hi. This is Ted. I’m calling to let you know you will be

retained by the company.”

I’ve gone through the cycle of uncertainty to certainty many times. As you may recall, I wrote earlier that I’ve been through 10 organization restructures. As I write this article, I’m currently in the midst of my 11th org change. Once again, I’m struggling with all of the self-doubt and uncertainty that comes with the unsettling circumstance. I don’t know what’s going to happen. I know that God is faithful, and I’ve placed my hope in him. Whatever does happen, I know that he is good and will lead me to where he wants me.

My friend, when faced with a dire circumstance, my charge to you is to pray, not lose heart, manage self-talk, keep a long-term perspective, face reality and take responsibility, and plan, act, and persevere. If you do, you’ll be filled with hope and succeed in whatever path you choose.

How about you? Where do you place your hope? How do you make it through tough times? I’d love to hear your story. Thanks for reading, and please share this message with someone in need of hope and encouragement.

Want to discover more about becoming a leader others will gladly follow? Visit my website, prestonpoore.com, today!

Cheers,

Preston

[1] Maxwell, John C., *Sometimes You Win, Sometimes You Learn*, Center Street, Hachette Book Group USA Day One 2013, p. 93.