

Work in Progress

Published monthly by Michele Crawford
Work in Progress is an electronic newsletter intended to assist individuals seeking optimum well-being.

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Work in Progress April 2006 Volume I Issue II  
Feature Article: Worry Less! Tangible Relief from the Stress of Constant Worrying

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1) Note from Michele

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Dear Reader

Welcome to Work in Progress: Part Two of Worry Less! Tangible Relief from the Stress of Constant Worrying. There is a country song that says: "The past is history... the future is a mystery... and the present is a gift." Read on for more information to clarify the importance of not focusing on the "mystery" with exaggeration and doom, thereby creating unnecessary fear. Capturing the future with assumptions of threat is called *worry*.

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2) Part Two: Worry Less! Tangible Relief from  
the Stress of Constant Worrying  
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Focus on **perspective**...

Fear-based stress can be created by losing perspective in three ways:

1. imaging the most horrible scenario possible;
2. assuming the worst scenario will happen; and
3. staying stuck on the most awful part.

1. **Imagining.** For a moment, pretend you are surrounded by real tigers... then imagine what you would do. The more you focus on how dangerous tigers are the more fearful it becomes. Here, tigers represent a worst case scenario. So what would be the best choice when you find yourself imaging a frightful situation like this? The best option is... stop imagining! such a scary event will happen. Imagining being surrounded by tigers is an example of **catastrophizing** (making mountains out of molehills).

A perspective-based solution is to ask yourself for the *evidence* that your worries will actually occur. Avoid the language of "horrible" and "awful" and other exaggerations. What are the FACTS? versus what you are imagining that has no basis in reality.

2. **Assuming the Worst.** When you "catastrophize," you can easily adopt the related habit of imaging the worst case scenario will occur or engage in "What if'ing...?" (For example, the children's story of Chicken Little focuses on his thought "What if the sky is falling?!" He runs around the farmyard in a panic because he could not control it. His *imagined* danger then became *real* when, in his confused state, he accepted the "safety" of the fox's den.) The pattern of "What if'ing...?" is making up scary "fairy tales" about your future that can't help but produce fear (here, the acronym of fear is: **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal).

When you develop a habit of catastrophizing and "what if'ing," you activate the fight or flight response, with all its ensuing chemicals of fear, and then you cannot think clearly. The **fight or flight or freeze** mechanism is the physical reaction that energizes all animals' survival responses. Designed for a physical world ("physical" refers to the

world of animals and prehistoric human beings), fight or flight releases chemicals that either activate or shut down certain physiological reactions that prepare the body to fight danger, to run away from danger, or to numb the pain response if the danger actually injures or maims.

A perspective-based solution is to teach yourself to think "This too shall pass" or "Then what?" whenever you find yourself "What if'ing...?" By working through the entire scenario, you become calmer. When you are calmer, you are less likely to exaggerate results.

When you become focused on a realistic outcome, you will no longer be stuck imagining the worst. For example, every storm (the problem) will end and the sun will come out. You chose which part, the storm or the sun (the solution), that receives your attention.

3. Stuck! on the Worst Possible Outcome. The final ways that you can lose perspective is to freeze-focus and remain stuck on the worst possible outcome. For example, if you focus only on a terrifying storm (instead of the brighter weather that will follow), you will choose to be stuck in fear. It's like surrounding yourself with tigers, storms and other assumptions of danger and alarm instead of choosing to focus on optimism, problem-solving, solutions and the concept of "the light at the end of the tunnel." You can choose your focus no matter what reality brings you.

Having a clear perspective means focusing on reality-based optimism and problem-solving. Perspective is the alternative to catastrophizing events and staying stuck on those elements.

By simply teaching yourself to:

- shift your focus to "What will happen next?" (or "Is it helpful or healthy to focus on this part?" or "Where is the evidence for this interpretation?" etc.), and
- practice this new response until it becomes habit; you will be calmer and more fulfilled by your experiences.

By challenging yourself to adopt and practice these two strategies, you can reduce your stress levels, especially associated with worry. Then you will increase your levels of happiness, optimism, confidence, self-worth and hope.

For more information, please contact:
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3) About Michele  
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Michele Crawford is a therapist who assists individuals who are struggling with trauma, anxiety or depression. Her passion for her work remains embedded in being able to connect with you in your suffering, helping you find real solutions no matter how complex the issue may be.

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4) Counselling Services  
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Are you prepared to live with more happiness, optimism, confidence, self-worth and hope? If your answer is "yes," then your next step is to contact me for a free 20-minute phone consultation. We can then discuss how I might best help you resolve your problems of Trauma, Depression and Anxiety.

The benefits of counselling with Michele include: significantly reduced stress levels, an optimistic outlook in life, increased confidence and hope.

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