

**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 November 2008 Volume III Issue XII  
Feature Article: Change the way you think; Change your life Part Five

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- 1) Note from Michele

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Dear Reader

Often, children’s stories teach worthy lessons. Of note, is the tragic tale of Chicken Little.

The master of catastrophizing is Chicken Little; a little drama queen in his own right. One day, Chicken Little is out walking and he is bonked on the head by an acorn. Like all chronic worriers, he immediately imagines the direst prediction possible: “What if it’s a piece of the sky?”

After jumping to the worst case scenario, worriers like Chicken Little assume his or her conclusion is probable. So the little guy cries out "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" He then runs around in panic because he knows he has no control over the sky.

Ironically, his panic is driven by his presupposing control of the future by determining the sky WILL fall. His panic blinds him to recognizing he neither has a crystal ball to accurately forecast future outcomes nor appreciating his prediction itself is generating his fear reaction.

Again like worriers, Chicken Little uses his racing heart, upset stomach and shakiness as evidence his thinking is valid. In reality, his body is responding to his words of calamity in an attempt to warn him to stop and think with common sense.

Chicken Little is in wackoville (Volume III Issue IX). By definition he is no longer able to think with logic, look for data to support his claims, act in his own best interests or focus on realistic goals. His fight or flight response is activated and he, in imagining danger, very clearly propels himself into real peril. And he brings his friends along.

His doomsday prophecies, agitation and hyper-arousal attract, terrify and trigger Henny Penny, Ducky Lucky, Goosey Loosey and Turkey Lurkey; who all join him in wackoville.

Foxy Loxy, being by nature foxy, takes advantage of the situation by offering the panicked group sanctuary in his den; safe from the falling sky. Since we all know the outcome of barnyard birds when they encounter foxes, this story ends badly.

What is most sad is that the conclusion was created by the characters' interpretation of events and not by reality. If Chicken Little could have learned the rational alternative to Awfulizing, the story would have had very different outcomes.

Even if he insisted on what if'ing worst circumstances possible, he would have then looked for confirmation to support his fear-based assumption. Where is the proof? What are the facts?

He would have taken a breath, turned his head to look for verification of his assumption, seen the acorn and merrily continued his day.

If people choose to make up things about the future, (like this plane will crash, there will be an earthquake while you're stuck on the

bridge, you will succumb to a terrible disease, and on and on); why not make up positive fantasies that enrich your life? Both are whimsy anyway. Unless you prefer living in fear.

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## 2) Feature Article: Change the way you think; Change your life Part Five

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A = Awfulizing beliefs catastrophize events beyond their initial and enduring power.

There are two levels of Awfulizing depending on the severity of the activating event. There is the aggravation of every day events: the subjective negative provocations in normal life patterns. Examples include traffic, long line-ups, noisy neighbours, annoying weather, breaking things, a bad hair cut, arguments, renovations, minor injuries, failing an exam, set-backs and so on.

The other level is more serious; life events including car accidents, losing your house to fire or repossession, cataclysmic weather, the death of a loved one and war; to name a few. To understand Awfulizing, the levels need to be addressed separately.

Aggravation – Making mountains out of molehills: the loss of perspective

Words are powerful. Whenever you use passionate extreme words to express subjective aggravation you will enter wackoville. Words that exaggerate and catastrophize beyond the intensity of actual occurrences automatically initiate your fight or flight response, in turn inflating your emotions and contaminating your behaviour.

Albert Ellis calls them STD's; which are quite contagious. Stupid Thinking Disorder occurs when your words overstate intent or degree of hardship.

For example, you choose words like awful and horrible to describe things like hangnails and shoes. What deserves to be called awful and horrible would be having your fingernails ripped out in a torture camp or losing your feet in an accident.

You loose perspective when you portray kitchen renos or bad hair days with words more appropriately descriptive of atrocity and acts of

violence. Word choice that is in harmony with the level of aggravation described allows you to be calmer, have healthy negative emotions and react in your best interests while maintaining a healthy body and lifestyle.

Making mountains out of molehills also includes making things up about the future like the sky is falling. You may think this prepares you for the worst things happening but that's an illusion.

The worst rarely happens, but it might as well occur every time because your reaction is already there. This is exhausting. Rather than being prepared, your energy stores (and health) are depleted. When you avoid catastrophizing, your resiliency requirements remain first-rate.

Adversity – Awfulizing about awful things: being stuck in victim-hood as a self-fulfilling prophecy

Ten people standing on a bridge do not get to pick which one gets hit by lightning. It's called life. Tragic events are generally random, choosing good and not so good people.

Ask yourself why do some people overcome adversity and others do not? Sit still and listen to the messages you create about the tragedy, repeating them over and over. Tell yourself your life is ruined and it will be. Not because of the event but because of the harm produced by this self-statement.

Awful things happen to everybody. Based on what you tell yourself, you will recover or you will stay trapped in misery (of course believing your misery is a result of the catastrophe and not your internal dialogue).

A victim of a violent crime can become stuck in victim-hood by defining your identity in the shadow of the event, damaged forever, doomed to wackoland. Awfulizing about awful things is a perpetual state of mind, long after you're in comparative safety and or physically healed. It requires a focus on being irreparably broken.

A better choice is realizing, no matter how disastrous, adversity can be interpreted as a transitory event that is now over. Now you can focus on moving forward, healing and re-integrating the shattered pieces into well-being. After all, you did survive and that deserves gratitude.

There is even potential for gifts of insight and character, a deeper level of moral development as well as spiritual lessons.

Reality dictates the randomness of tragedy. Awfulizing in its aftermath will bind you to the tragedy: it becomes your new identity while closing your heart and ruining your spirit.

After catastrophe, beliefs can keep you immovable in their influence of pain or encourage you to shift towards the light at tunnel's end: the choice is yours.

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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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