

Good morning, everybody, Dennis Engelbrecht, with The Family Business Institute Digging Deeper.

We talked a few weeks ago about the essence of competition. And today I want to talk a little bit about performing under duress. Which as part of the essence of competition and duress happens to us at different times, and some of us excel and some of us do not. But to be a great leader, I think you need to be able to excel under duress.

One aspect of this performing under duress is keeping your head. And whether it's you're in a presentation and something gets derailed, your IT doesn't work, or they come up with a new question that you didn't expect, or one of your team members is fumbling with something. What do you do at that point? I was recently reading about one of the crane collapses in New York City. And certainly, that's a major crisis that's facing one of our members right now. And thinking back in time, I remember when we had a youth killed on a job site by a piece of equipment. And that again, that's kind of a crisis that might throw you into duress.

And certainly, on the job site, whether it's between owner and GC or GC and trade contractors, sometimes the heat goes up because there are disagreements and things like that. And those are all sort of examples of how you might get under duress in construction. And then how do you respond?

I recently encountered a quote from Ziad Abdelnour who offered a good set of principles to follow. He said, "Don't promise when you're happy, don't reply when you're mad and don't decide when you're sad." I thought, "Well, that's kind of interesting." And I thought thinking about, "Well, why wouldn't you promise when you're happy?" Well, sometimes maybe that's when you give away the whole ship or whatever because you think everything's going to be great, and then you make promises that maybe you even can't keep. Don't reply when you're mad. I think that's kind of an easy one.

Anytime you reply when you're mad, it's likely the reply is not going to be well thought out. It might be insulting, it might raise the temperature of the situation versus maybe bring the temperature down, might escalate. It might lead to things that you actually regret. And then don't decide when you're sad, you maybe have to think a little bit deeper about. But when you're sad, you're probably not confident. You may have some hopelessness going or a lack of energy or a lack of confidence, and you may come up with solutions that therefore don't reflect the confidence or creativity or energy that are needed to get the best out of the situation.

So, I thought that was good to remember. As most of you know, I play a lot of tennis. And in a tennis match frequently there are turns of momentum that go against you. Just yesterday, we were winning five, one in the first set and we ended up losing seven, five. And then we were down four, one in the second set and ended up winning that set. So big changes in momentum. You're under duress, you're about to lose, and then all of a sudden, what changes and how do you change it?

I think first you have to look at what causes those changes in momentum. And I think as humans, we have tendency at times to not be our best. Maybe we lose energy, or we lose confidence. And it's also possible that our opponent has adjusted their strategy. They're doing something different, and we haven't quite picked up on it. And if you fail to react to that, the momentum of a situation might just carry its way through to a losing end.

So, any situation that you're under duress suggests you follow some of the following tips. First, it's incumbent upon you to keep your head in these difficult situations. If you don't keep your head, you get angry, you get all emotional things are likely to stay sideways, and you're unlikely to come up with a better solutions. Instead, what you need to be doing is analyzing the situation and analyzing that. Find out what has changed or what can you change going forward. If you can create a change or come up with a strategy or an energy that changes things, you very likely can change the outcomes to the better.

Of course, in any case, a solution has to be viable. You can sort of have the pie in the sky solutions and those might not get you there and might not be accepted and might not get you out of that duress situation. So, they've got to be viable solutions. Things that are within your capabilities. Always a good idea to slow down. What's interesting, I think if you look at a lot of sports, a lot of times in stress situations, people actually speed up. And you'll see that in arguments of course, where people very quickly react off of the other person, and that's all negative. It's very important to slow down, take your time, allow time for thoughts.

If you're in an argument, maybe take a full 10 seconds to respond to something. You might even... So, you're just not sitting there in total silence might even ask, "Well, give me a moment to think about that." And then truly do think about that before you respond. And you're likely to come up with a better response under that situation of duress.

Always use empathy. Always seek to understand before being understood. So use your empathy to try to understand the other side when you're in a duress situation or in an argument or that kind of thing. And then after easing tensions, that's the best time really to go back into a win-win situation. Try to partner your way to a solution with whatever's causing the duress or whoever the argument or something like that is with. So, performing under duress, certainly one of the keys to winning in life and in business.

Dennis Engelbrecht, Digging Deeper.