

Life is Hard – The Art of Responding to Adversity

By Robert Bisking, PhD

Dean, OLLU School of Business and Leadership

On May 6, 2008, many of you probably had your evening TV viewing interrupted with startling scenes of the flames engulfing the fourth floor of the Main Building of Our Lady of the Lady University (OLLU). As the dean of the School of Business and Leadership at OLLU, I sat in stunned silence, speechless. Adversity is hard enough to deal with when we see it coming, but when it happens in a fashion such as this, you truly feel like you have had the wind knocked out of you to the point where you take on a glazed look.

The basic premise of M. Scott Peck's book "The Road Less Traveled" is that *life is hard!* If you have been incredibly blessed in your life to not have faced any adversities, I hate to break the news to you, but that streak will end sooner rather than later. I am not a pessimist, in fact, I am a supreme optimist. However, as I have "matured" my optimism has been tempered by a healthy dose of realism. How each of us deals with adversity will be different. The important thing to remember is that we **MUST** deal with it. You can not ignore the difficult situations and adversities that life will bring your way.

So, how do we deal with them? As I have said, we all deal with adversity in different ways, so there are an endless number of things we can do that can help us, even prepare us, to cope. I will share with you just a few macro-level ways to handle those "bumps-in-the-road" of life. One excellent way is to recognize that none of us are bullet-proof. We all need help from time to time. Sometimes one of the best ways to deal with situations in our lives is to seek advice from close friends, colleagues or professionals. Many times just the ability to talk with someone who will just listen is a powerful coping mechanism.

Preparation and planning are so important to not being blind-sided by adversity. We get so busy in our day to day existence that we do not spend sufficient time looking into the future and create "what-if" scenarios. The military, as many of you know, call this contingency planning. Much of the success I have experienced in business and life, I owe to my military career. The military taught me how to plan for contingencies, emergencies and the potential for surprise. I always like to have a "Plan B" and most times also have plans "C", "D", etc. Having options available in the event of adverse situations can minimize the impact.

Although you may consider me to be biased since I am an educator, but as I look back over my career, my participation in educational opportunities has had a major

impact on my ability to respond (and cope) with adversities that have come my way. Whether it was a formal college education, a professional development workshop, a self-study course or just knowledge I gained from being a voracious reader, the education, training and development I have experienced has never been wasted. I am sure you have heard some say education (i.e. knowledge) is power. I do not disagree, but I feel a better way to view education is that it is more than just knowledge – it is freedom! Education opens up opportunities for you that are countless. Many of them you will not realize until some time in the future. So I challenge you to become a life-long learner. If you do not have a college degree or haven't completed one – do it – now! If you have a college degree, keep seeking knowledge. Look into getting a graduate degree. Remember – education is freedom!

Okay, I left you hanging. How are we doing at OLLU? We are blessed! No one was injured in the fire. All the administrative offices that were damaged have been relocated on the campus. We are making accommodations for the dozen or so classrooms and computer labs we lost. The outpouring from the community has been amazing. The Lake is an institution that has roots 113 years deep in San Antonio. The Sisters of the Congregation of Divine Providence are our strength and through their many prayers, the leadership of the administration, faculty, staff and students we will be stronger than we were before. Feel free to contact me should you have any questions. So, until next time, my prayer is for you and your families to be abundantly blessed.