

EC1 AGILITY IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS



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INTRODUCTION

Volatility. Complexity. Unrelenting change at unprecedented speed. This is the environment that the Inspection Service, along with the rest of the country, faces daily.

Given this landscape, what must we learn as an organization to prepare us to respond effectively? How do we accelerate our ability to pivot from a routine weather event, like a heavy rain storm, to a novel event, like Hurricane Maria? More importantly, how does the USPIS thrive and achieve operational agility in a time of such dizzying change?

These are the questions we continuously ask as we seek to understand what crisis management means in the twenty-first century.

Assessing the tools and the training programs that currently exist, we determined that the USPIS is properly equipped to successfully respond to specific, routine events, such as a white powder hoax, a serious assault, or a robbery. There are check lists, standard operating procedures, and a history to provide guidance. We have a long and impressive track record that demonstrates our capacity to manage the routine.

What is needed now is training that speaks to “novel” events, the kind of incidents for which there is no history, no playbook, no checklist, or set of standard operating procedures to tell us what to expect and how to lead.

“Agility in the Midst of Crisis” speaks to all of the above and more, with a major focus on managing stress. The framework is based on the latest neuroscience research, which confirms that stress and anxiety play critical roles in decision-making. If not managed, they can hinder judgment and the ability to adapt to an unprecedented, novel crisis.

Going forward, it will be incumbent on all of us to understand the difference between routine and novel crises and to develop the capacity to respond to each appropriately.

Managing emotions. The ability to improvise, to think creatively, to collaborate, to empathize, to create “culture on the fly,” to recognize unconscious bias, to understand System 1 (fast) and System 2 (slow) thinking. To know how to recover

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and to build resilience after an incident. To make decisions and take actions that are grounded in our deepest, innermost values. These are the hallmarks of the USPIS “Agility in the Midst of Crisis” curriculum, which is based on neuroscientific strategies combined with mindfulness techniques, counsel from law enforcement experts throughout the country, and Harvard University’s annual “Leadership in Crisis” week-long seminar. Concepts from the latter were customized to respond to the unique needs of the Inspection Service.

This new way of thinking about and responding to crises was first rolled out in November 2018, to members of the USPIS Detroit Division. The accompanying tool kit, created by the USPIS and Certified Neuro Leadership Coach, Linda Cassell, captures key exercises and strategies introduced during the one-day training. It is anticipated that eventually all divisions will have an opportunity to participate.

With or without the formal training, there are things that we can and should be doing right now to prepare ourselves and the men and women we lead to effectively deal with the inevitable next novel event. They include:

1. Create a safe environment where people feel comfortable to speak up, to question, and to offer new ideas without judgment. This is how we will create a culture of innovation.
2. Trust and empower your employees. This will help to reinforce the culture of self-reliance and autonomy that has long been part of the Inspection Service.
3. Honor all voices. Encourage clarity and candor, what some call “fearless communication.” Recognize that the best thinking occurs in an environment where all voices are important and valued.
4. Continue to train for specific events (active shooter, etc.). Such training develops skills critical for responding to routine crises and differs from “Agility in the Midst of Crisis,” which provides tools to develop more “elastic and agile” thinking.
5. Embrace and seek input from many sources. The most creative solutions are often generated by incorporating the thoughts and perspectives of the rich diversity of cultures, age groups, and experience levels that comprise the Inspection Service.

President John F. Kennedy said, “To be courageous ... is an opportunity that sooner or later will be presented to all of us.” The USPIS is presented with such opportunities continuously. It is my hope that when confronted with the extreme and unexpected, the “Agility in the Midst of Crisis” training will enhance our abilities to remain calm, focused, and anchored in the values of the USPIS.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

BACKGROUND

Stress kills brain cells. In seconds.

When a brain cell, or neuron, dies, that's it. You don't get it back. That's a scientific fact.

Neuroplasticity is also a scientific fact. And that is good news.

Researchers have discovered that the brain has the capacity to create new neural connections and to reorganize itself to compensate for injury, disease, and the results of prolonged stress. For example, brain activity associated with a given function in one area of the brain that has been adversely impacted can be transferred to a different, functioning location.

What does this mean for law enforcement officers, first responders, medical practitioners, and leaders responsible for overseeing crisis operations, who experience stress, often for prolonged periods?

You can learn to recover from stressful incidents and build up your resilience reservoir (to prepare for the next crisis) by using simple, neuroscientific strategies and mindfulness techniques.

EXERCISES:

BUILDING RESILIENCE

After Action

If you have been actively involved in a crisis, especially over a prolonged period, your “after action” experience will include the residual effects of stress. Studies show that burnout, loss of empathy, lack of motivation, decreased mental and physical energy, irritability, and an inability to focus are common, normal reactions.

If you find these symptoms remaining after several weeks, take notice and act, either on your own or by reaching out for professional guidance.

Reflect, yes! Ruminating, no!

Regaining the ability to fully focus is the most common complaint and symptom of after incident/crisis or post-traumatic stress.

The human brain is biased towards focusing on the negative. Therefore, after an incident you may find yourself ruminating on what didn't work.

Rumination causes the traumatic memory to be further embedded into the memory circuits of the brain, making it more difficult to reduce its impact. That leads to more mental stress.

Any form of mental stress can interfere with the ability to solve problems and think clearly.

Reflecting on the incident, without judgment, will redirect the brain's focus, from negativity to one of curiosity. What happened? What went right? What do I feel good about? What could we do better next time?

Share your deepest concerns with a trusted colleague or advisor, someone who will listen without judgment.

The following exercises are designed to mitigate the residual effects of stress. If you don't begin to feel relief, let someone else do the driving for you. Work with a professional counselor who can help you get back to a healthier you.

Exercise: Write Your After-Crisis Stress Away

1. Deeply relax. Slowly yawn, stretch, focus on your breath, close your eyes, and think of something or someone that instantly brings a smile to your face. Choose which one works for you. As you begin to feel relaxed, pleasant, or calm, let the feelings consume you.
2. Remaining deeply relaxed, recall the stressful memories of the incident, without judgment.
3. Write down one of your most worrisome, troubling memories, and then counter it with something different you will do the next time or something good that did happen. Example: I still worry that we didn't move fast enough to get sufficient supplies to the elderly couple in the remote, rural part of the country. Answer: Even though we didn't get to that older couple fast enough, I'm so proud that we were able to help so many hundreds of people.

Answer each of your worries in this same manner. Your brain will thank you.

Exercise: Give your Brain a Break

Brain scientists have discovered that 30 to 60 seconds of relaxation can recharge your mental batteries, providing sufficient energy to continue your work with clarity and focus. Review the following activities. Which one most resonates with you? Do that activity, slowly and mindfully, every 60 to 90 minutes. What difference do you notice?

- Yawning. Runners yawn before they race; musicians and speakers yawn before they go on stage; snipers are trained to yawn before they pull the trigger. Yawning improves cognitive functioning and is the most efficient way to release mental stress.
- Stretching. It is the most efficient way to lower physical stress.

- Hand massage. Gently rub your palms together. Stroke your forearms. The brain responds to soothing touch and will send relaxation signals to tense muscles. (Human beings do this instinctively, often when nervous.)
- One mindful breath. You don't need to spend months practicing meditation. Brain scan studies show that "awareness can be mastered in a matter of minutes," so says Chade-Meng Tang, creator of Google's mindfulness training program. Take one mindful breath a day. (If you can do more, please do! It can only help.)
- Anchor words. What word reminds you to stay calm, relaxed, and pleurably involved in an activity? What word is deeply meaningful to you? Repeat the word, focus on it, pay attention to the images it evokes. According to researchers at UCLA, "reflecting on personal values can keep neuroendocrine and psychological responses to stress at low levels."

Exercise: Eliminate the Emotional Noise

Emotional noise prevents you from focusing and keeps you distracted. You can turn off the emotional noise by practicing these exercises (or anything else that calms you, like music, art, etc.) and regain your ability to focus.

Accept your perceived mistakes out loud. "Yes, I made a mistake. I can't undo it. Next time I will have a better strategy. And, while I made a mistake, I also did a lot of good."

Accept your actions. Acknowledge that you were nervous, scared, uncertain. Write down what is worrying you on a piece of paper. Then yawn, stretch, gently massage your hands as you gaze at your writing. Watch how the worries and anxiety begin to dissipate.

Come back to being calm.

Repeat: I am always in the present moment. (IAAITPM)

The above exercises will help refresh the neurochemicals that are needed to support healthy cognitive functioning. It is an important part of the renewal or resilience process. You can liken it to depositing money in your savings account, only its your resilience account. You are building up your reserve in preparation for the next big incident.

SYSTEM 1 AND SYSTEM 2 THINKING

GO SLOW TO GO FAST

Understanding Daniel Kahneman's System 1 and System 2 thinking, also known as thinking fast and thinking slow, will help you understand how your brain operates. When you understand how your brain operates, you are better equipped to control how you respond during a crisis.

Why?

You can learn how to direct your thoughts, which will impact the actions that you take, and the decisions you make.

System 1 Thinking:

System 1 Thinking is automatic and fast; it operates with little or no effort. It is quick, emotional, and intuitive. Examples include:

- One plus one.
- Bread and _____.
- Detecting anger in a voice.
- Starting your car.
- Reading words on large billboards.

In a crisis, when things are moving fast and chaotically, System 1 is where we do most of our thinking. For this reason, it is important to understand that it has its limitations.

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First, it is *“biased to believe and confirm.”* That means that whatever view of the world we hold to be true, whether correct or not, is what our brains are motivated to reinforce. The danger?

Biases drive behaviors.

This can lead to flawed decision making and fatal errors.

Second, System 1 Thinking cannot be turned off. For example, you cannot refrain from understanding simple words in your native language. Tree. Walk. Cry. Yawn. You can't tell your brain not to understand the meaning of those words. (However, when you were learning how to read and spell, you were in System 2 thinking.)

Third, System 1 Thinking operates as a machine for jumping to conclusions. The brain is motivated to quickly make sense of trauma and crises. It doesn't know what it doesn't know. It acts on “first” impressions and intuition. As soon as it comes up with a solution, “feel good” neurochemicals are released, like oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphins. Excellent! Problem solved!

Maybe not.

System 1 Thinking is governed by the WYSIATI Rule: What You See Is All There Is. The problem? What you see is never all there is, especially in a crisis. Therefore, if you make your decision thinking that what you see is all there is, you may make a grievous error.

System 2 Thinking:

System 2 Thinking is slower, more deliberative, and logical. It happens when the prefrontal dorsal lateral cortex is activated. Activities that require more attention, more mental energy (like looking for a man with red hair in a crowd of people, maintaining a faster walking speed than is natural, telling someone your phone number, monitoring your responses in a social situation, or computing 17×654) are examples of System 2 Thinking.

In a crisis situation, you will switch between fast and slow thinking, but you will mostly be in System 1, fast thinking. The goal is to learn when to go fast and when to go slow, and to be conscious of each.

You want to be in System 2 Thinking when you are faced with making critical decisions, like choosing the best action to take in an emergency.

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For example, if you were Captain Sullenberger in January of 2009, flying over the Hudson River when both engines of your US Airways plane died, you had to first do some fast thinking to assess what happened. Then, you had to slow down your thinking to move from the initial “shocked, reactive” state to a more deliberative state. In that more deliberative state of mind, you decided the best choice was to land your US Airways plane on the Hudson River. You did, and the lives of all 155 passengers on board were saved.

Simply put, if you are under stress and in a reactive state, whatever you are compelled to do, don't do it! It's likely not the best decision.

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EXERCISES

SYSTEM 1 AND SYSTEM 2 THINKING

How do you know if you are in System 1 or System 2 thinking?

We need and value System 1 thinking. It's from this state of consciousness that we make most of our everyday decisions. It's not better than System 2 or worse than System 2. It's simply different, and those differences have limitations. For example, System 1 thinking can lead to "reactive" thinking, which can cause deadly errors in a crisis situation. For this reason, it's important to be able to check yourself. Are you in System 1 or System 2 thinking?

How do you know?

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR TENSION.

Your body will always tell you: sweaty palms, heart racing, shallow breathing, leg cramps, stomach pains, head ache, irritability, tight jaws, etc.

You can't turn off System 1 Thinking, so what can you do?

Interrupt it.

How?

Give your brain a break. Consciously choose to yawn, stretch, breathe, or massage your hands.

“Mindfully” yawn, noticing every sensation that takes place in your facial muscles, your eyes, your neck, your lips. You can do this in 30 seconds or less, anywhere, anytime. Yawning:

- Awakens the brain.
- Relaxes your upper body.
- Reduces psychological stress.
- Brings blood into the prefrontal cortex so it can function optimally.
- Increases memory recall.

One more thing. It is impossible to worry and yawn at the same time! In a crisis, you don’t have time to worry. You need to act thoughtfully. Yawning will get you there.

Supercharge the benefit of yawning by adding a slow, mindful stretch. Combine these two and you will release approximately 1,200 stress-reducing neurochemicals!

Hand massage. The brain reacts to soothing touch. Consciously choose to gently massage your hands, noticing how your palms feel, the texture of your fingers. Are they cold, hot, or somewhere in between? Do this for a few seconds, you will begin to feel a calming effect, and your system will slow down.

Take one mindful breath. In a crisis situation, you need to be 100% aware, entirely focused and in the moment. Brain scan studies indicate that “awareness” can be mastered in minutes. Joseph Pfeiffer, the first New York City Fire Chief to arrive at the World Trade Center on September 11th, chose to take sixty seconds to breathe before entering what he knew would be a horrific scene.

You can’t turn System 1 off but you can use these neuroscientific strategies and mindfulness techniques to interrupt it!

The Antidote to the WYSIATI rule

How do you counter the brain’s “What you see is all there is” (known as the WYSIATI rule) tendency when in the midst of a crisis?

IAAITPM.

You must consciously remind yourself, “I am always in the present moment” (IAAITPM). If you are in the present moment, you are taking in, absorbing,

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processing the experience and what you see without judgment or jumping to conclusions. Nothing more. That leaves the brain open for new information.

Ask questions:

What am I not seeing?

What am I missing?

What do I need to know before I make a decision?

Be like Captain Sullenberger. Ask your co-pilot (your colleagues), "Am I overlooking anything? What have I missed?"

Be like Joseph Pfeiffer. Take 60 seconds. Breathe.

DEVELOPING A GROWTH MINDSET

THE KEY TO EFFECTIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT

“If you’re afraid of making mistakes, you’ll never learn on the job, and your whole approach becomes defensive: ‘I have to make sure I don’t screw up,’”

—Robert Sternberg, American Psychological Association

Successfully managing a crisis, especially a “novel” crisis, involves “learning on the job,” also known as “improvising.” You are facing a situation that is entirely new. There is no standard operating procedure or rule book to guide you. You can’t fall back on past experiences because there is nothing in the past with which to compare.

Some leaders manage novel crises well. Others fail.

Why?

Fixed Mindset or Growth Mindset?

Dr. Carol S. Dweck, author of *Mindset, The New Psychology of Success: How we can Learn to Fulfill our Potential*, and psychology professor at Stanford University, believes the key to effective leadership is directly related to mindset.

Leaders who believe that intelligence, ability, and skills can be developed with effort and diligence, have a *growth mindset*. Their focus is on “increasing” their ability. They have *learning* goals. Setbacks, failures, and challenges motivate them to try harder, to learn more. They’re not afraid to take risks or to try something new because they’re not worried about how smart they look to

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others. People who believe in their own and others' abilities to grow are more likely to face concerns early on and deal with problems openly.

Basketball champion Michael Jordan famously said: "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." This is the quintessential example of someone with a growth mindset.

Leaders who believe that intelligence is innate, abilities are something that you either have or you don't, and your personal qualities are basically inherent have a *fixed mindset*. They have "performance" goals. Therefore, they are less likely to make "bold, visionary moves" because they may fail. Fixed mindsets tend to have an "all or nothing" view of their own and others' abilities. They are hesitant to bring up problems, which can lead to ignoring signs of trouble or abandoning a project or a relationship for fear of failure.

It's possible to have a "fixed" mindset about your ability to learn math and a "growth" mindset about your ability to learn a new language. In fact, most of us are a mixture of the two. The key is to understand each, to recognize from which mindset we are functioning, and know how to make the transition from fixed to growth.

EXERCISE

GROWTH MINDSET

How to transform a fixed mindset into a growth mindset.

Based on the work of Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

Modified and adapted by Linda Cassell, certified Neuro Leadership Coach

Dweck warns that “changing mindsets is not like surgery.” It is not an overnight process, but with focus and intention change is absolutely possible. Try the following:

- If you find yourself enjoying something, like composing an article for publication, learning a new budget reporting process, completing a crossword puzzle, or learning a new piece of software, and you suddenly become tired, hungry, frustrated, or bored, don't stop! It's the fixed mindset creeping in, making you believe you can't master it. Instead, take a deep breath. Visualize your brain forming new, neural connections that will help you succeed and the benefits of mastering the new skill, etc. Tell yourself, “I got this. I can do it.” Then, try the activity again through the lens of a growth mindset. (Visualization is one of the most powerful brain-based strategies for achieving goals.)
- Seek constructive criticism. Don't wait for it. Ask for it. Get curious. What nuggets can I take from this to improve?
- Is there something you long to do but are afraid you will fail? Decide to do it. Chunk it down into incremental steps with dates attached. Each time you take action, consciously praise yourself for moving

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in the direction of your dream. Then visualize how your life will change for the better. This latter step will light up the motivation centers of your brain and sustain you when you reach the inevitable bumps along your chosen journey.

Finally, know your triggers. What can catapult you into a fixed mindset?

First, get deeply relaxed. Yawn. Breathe. Do a super slow stretch. The more relaxed you are, the more open you will be to learning about yourself.

Ask: Is there something in my past that measured me? Is there something I wanted but didn't get? Is there a failure that I allowed to define and confine me? Is there something from my past that is holding me back now?

Being fired from a job, denied a promotion, failing a critical test, losing a game, being rejected from the school of your choice, experiencing betrayal by a loved one?

Whatever it is, recall the memory and all of the emotions, embarrassment, and pain that came with it. Allow those feelings to surface and then wash through you.

Now recall the incident with a growth mindset perspective. Acknowledge whatever role you played in the situation and understand that this incident does not define your abilities or intelligence. It has no control over you unless you allow it.

That was then. This is now.

Ask: What did I learn or can I learn from that experience? How can I use it as a springboard for growth?

Then, complete this sentence: Next time that happens I will _____.

Your brain will thank you for answering that question. It means that you have a solution and your brain can rest in peace, releasing the mental energy that was trapped by a painful memory that you have transformed into a springboard for growth.

How does mindset impact you, as a leader, facing routine and novel crises?

People who have growth mindsets generally possess the mental and emotional agility to successfully manage crises. They are more likely to:

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- Embrace challenges (fixed mindset avoids challenges).
- Persist even when facing difficulties or setbacks (fixed mindset gives up more easily).
- Accept effort and hard work as the path to mastering new skills (fixed mindset sees effort as useless because it's impossible to change what is not innate).
- Learn from criticism (fixed mindset shuns feedback).
- Savor the success of colleagues and seek to learn from the best (fixed mindset is threatened by the success of others).

As a leader, you can create a culture which encourages a growth mindset by:

- Acknowledging new and creative approaches to solving problems (even if it doesn't initially lead to a successful outcome).
- Giving constructive criticism that fosters an understanding of how to fix a problem rather than labeling or judging the effort.
- Setting and/or encouraging "learning" goals that focus on expanding skills and knowledge.

Successfully managing crises is part art, part science, part knowledge, and a lot of preparation. Creating art, by its very definition, requires a growth mindset. Vincent Van Gogh may have said it best:

"If you hear a voice within you say, 'you cannot paint,' then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced."

"You cannot paint" is the voice of the fixed mindset. It only lasts as long as we allow it.

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THE VALUE OF VALUES

STRATEGY + VALUE = FLAWLESS PERFORMANCE

On January 15, 2009, Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger knew his US Airways plane (flight 1549) was going down. Both engines were disabled by a bird strike. He had precious little time to decide if he should follow air-traffic controllers’ instructions to return to La Guardia or try something else. He concluded that the plane could not last long enough to make it back to the airport. Instead, he piloted the plane to a water landing on the Hudson River, saving the lives of the 155 passengers on board. No one was injured or perished.

Sully recalled that the moments before the ditching were “the worst sickening, pit-of-your-stomach, falling-through-the-floor feeling” that he had ever experienced. “One way of looking at this might be that for 42 years, I’ve been making small, regular deposits in this bank of experience, education, and training. And on January 15, the balance was sufficient so that I could make a very large withdrawal.”

A very large withdrawal indeed.

What really happened here? What was going on inside the mind and heart of Captain Sully as he made the decision to land the plane in the Hudson River?

Strategy + Value = Flawless Performance

Sully had a strategy. As stressful as it was to land his plane in the Hudson River, he was banking on his years of experience. He had put in his 10,000 hours. He knew how to make a landing that would require every bit of experience, skill, and judgment he had accumulated over his long career.

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Sully also had a value. He was focused on saving the lives of the passengers on board. Saving lives became his anchor value. It was the fuel that was strong enough to override “the worst sickening, pit-of-your-stomach, falling-through-the-floor feeling” he had so that he could remain calm and one-hundred percent in the present moment as he piloted his plane through the choppy, icy waters of the Hudson River.

The result? A flawless performance.

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EXERCISE:

FINDING YOUR DEEPEST, INNERMOST VALUE

Strategy + Value = Flawless Performance

Based on the work of Mark Waldman and Andy Newberg, M.D.

Modified and adapted by Linda Cassell, certified Neuro Leadership Coach

Identifying and connecting with your deepest, innermost value has profound benefits.

Firefighters entering a burning building have two things. First, they have a strategy. After thousands of hours of intense practice and experience, they know how to extinguish the fire. Second, they have a value — saving lives — that anchors, drives, and calms them as they enter potential danger.

According to researchers at UCLA, “reflecting on personal values can keep psychological responses to stress at low levels.”

Do the following exercise and you will:

1. improve the health of your brain,
2. protect yourself from burnout at work,
3. reduce your propensity to ruminate about failure,
4. be less reactive and defensive when someone confronts you with uncomfortable information, and
5. think more clearly and creatively under stressful conditions.

The Exercise:

- Take a moment to get grounded/relaxed. Mindfully yawn, stretch, focus on a pleasant memory. Breathe gently.
- When you are fully relaxed, ask yourself: In this moment, what is my deepest, innermost value?
- Write down whatever comes to mind. Do not censor yourself, even if you think your response does not make sense.
- Close your eyes again for at least 30 seconds, listening to your inner voices and paying attention to whatever thoughts and feelings float through your mind; ask yourself: In this moment, what is my deepest, innermost value?
- Then open your eyes and write down a single word or phrase that captures your deepest value.
- Close your eyes again, remaining deeply relaxed. This time, ask your intuition: In this moment, what is my deepest, innermost value?
- Open your eyes and write down whatever words or phrases come to mind.
- Remaining deeply relaxed, gaze at your responses. They may be the same or they may be different. Circle the value that most resonates with you.

How does it make you feel? What comes up for you when you focus on this value?

If you focus for a few seconds multiple times throughout the day on your deepest, innermost value, it will anchor you as you work through stressful situations, help you think more clearly, and positively impact your ability to communicate effectively with strength and empathy.

Before entering any crisis situation, know what your deepest, innermost value is. Take that value with you. It will become your anchor of calm, which will help you think clearly and creatively.



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