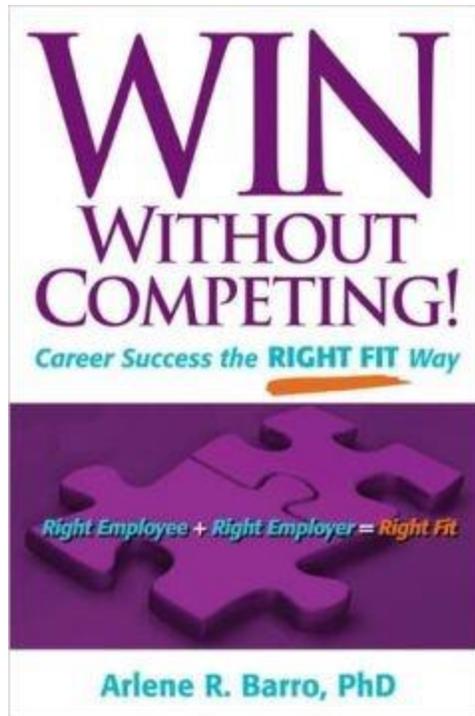


Conquering Stress! With Dr. Arlene — Uncertainty Causes Stress



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By Dr. Arlene Barro

Do you eat dessert first? That is exactly what many school children do at lunch. When I asked them why, they said that they knew it would be delicious. They were uncertain whether they would enjoy the rest of their lunch. They chose certainty, they picked the delicious dessert first.

Research indicates that people prefer pain from shock treatments rather than anticipating them, which causes fear. We crave certainty, even if it causes pain.

Can you create certainty?

In many situations you can control and orchestrate the results. It is easier than you think, if you know what you want. Decisiveness is essential, if you want certainty. Here is an unforgettable story about managing that which many fear.

A smart, spunky 83-year-old woman named Ruth told her daughter that she wanted to purchase a coffin. Her dutiful daughter took her to the same funeral home that took care of her father. Ruth, eager to select

her coffin, requested a pink coffin, which the funeral director presented followed by a pink pillow which she also requested.

When they arrived home, Ruth selected her burial outfit. Then, she gave her daughter more instructions. After the funeral, she wanted everyone to return to their home. She envisioned two In-N-Out Burger trucks waiting on the sidewalk. Ruth said that the guests would eat quickly and leave. She told her daughter that she did not want a country club reception which they had done for her father. Then, she said that she would haunt her daughter, for the rest of her life if she did not do what she had asked.

When Ruth asked her daughter to confirm that she would carry out her wishes, she had great difficulty with that. The daughter asked me what to do because she felt stressed. I suggested that she draw up a proclamation for her mother to review and finalize which stated her wishes. Then, I told her she could post the proclamation on each truck. The daughter loved the idea and felt relieved. I knew that the daughter, a classy woman, did not want people to think she was not honoring her mother's memory, the thought of that caused her stress.

What is your compass?

Billionaire Warren Buffet talks about two different ways of making decisions: the inner and outer scorecard. He makes decisions using the inner scorecard. His compass is the set of standards that he created to guide him. This is analogous to my Right Fit Method which I have discussed in my columns. Ruth used the inner scorecard in pre-planning her funeral. Her daughter, on the other hand, used the outer scorecard. She was concerned about what the neighbors would think about eating food from trucks after her mother's funeral.

How did Buffet create the inner and outer scorecard? He observed his parents' behavior. Each parent used a different scorecard. If you crave certainty, craft an inner scorecard. Using this approach to make decisions will decrease uncertainty and stress. You will strive to match your standards, not someone else's.

Is it possible to alternate between scorecards depending on the situation? Perhaps. However, one scorecard or the other will be dominant because that defines the essence of how you make decisions. Do you use the inner or outer scorecard?

Are you igniting uncertainty?

All day long you talk to yourself: if you engage in positive self-talk, you can foster feelings of certainty as you encourage and compliment yourself as well as others. Positive self-talk is a highly effective strategy to maintain a low level of stress.

If you engage in negative self-talk, you can ignite uncertainty and fear. Negative self-talk will fuel stress. You have the strategies to conquer stress caused by uncertainty. Use them and experience tranquility.

Questions about uncertainty causing stress? Email drbarro@barroglobal.com Responses could appear in her next column.

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