

4 Ways to Get Unstuck Bruce E. Roselle, PhD

About 10 years ago, I coached an executive who in his earlier years was a member of the German national hang-gliding team. I learned about his life history as part of our introductory conversation, and I expressed my interest in learning more about his hang-gliding experience.

Enthusiastically, he described how each competitor would jump from the highest point, and then try to stay aloft. The winner was that person who could glide for the longest time. He also shared his winning strategy with me: to aim for those parts of the landscape where he would most likely get a thermal 'lift' that would propel him higher and keep him aloft longer. It was fascinating.

Since then, I have often used this example as a metaphor for looking for spots that would give a leader some 'lift' out of the doldrums and carry them to their next goal. During these COVID-related shutdowns and mandates, several of my coaching clients are much in need of some lift to carry them and their team upward and forward. They express frustration and discouragement with the 'new normal' in their workplaces.

One in particular has lost several key individuals during this time of limbo and worries how she will be able to keep her team of directors in place. Another expressed concern about how he will keep his own sense of sanity in the uncertainty.

I shared this hang-gliding image with them and asked them to consider how they could use the four-point approach, below, to begin to move forward again:

1. **Focus on the big-picture goal, not the temporary setbacks.** In your work and life, it is so easy to lose big-picture focus and, instead, get stuck in the obstacles holding you back. Putting your focus on the immovableness of your barriers gives them more power over you. Knowing your big picture goal--your purpose in your work and life--on the other hand, can help lift you up over these obstructions.
2. **Identify those parts of your work and life that give you the most lift.** Even in the darkest moments you face, there are glimmers of hope that break through the clouds. Where are the 'wins' in your work, the situations that bring you laughter and satisfaction? Who are the people in your family and neighborhood that love you the most and appreciate you? What activities give you the most joy in your life? Knowing the source of your joy is central to living and leading wholeheartedly.
3. **Figure out how to steer toward these 'thermals'.** Once you identify these life-giving aspects of your work and life, develop a strategy for leveraging them further. Doing so will provide increased energy and encouragement to the other activities that you must also accomplish. Focus on these thermals, determine how to spend more time in these activities and with these

people, and be thankful for them during this stuck period. In my first book, **Vital Truths** (2002), I suggested starting off your day speaking out loud your thankfulness for specific people, situations, and activities in your life, and then doing the same thing at the end of your day to create a “thankfulness sandwich” every day.

4. **Recalibrate what you can reasonably expect to accomplish.** Be kind to yourself as a leader and to your team members by recalibrating what can be done in the ‘new normal’. Working virtually, for example, means that it is more difficult to spontaneously visit a coworker’s office to discuss an issue, but you will spend less time getting to meetings that are across the building or campus in which you work, since they are now only a click away. Give yourself grace for those tasks you are unable to accomplish, be assertive with your leaders about what you are now able to get done and renegotiate expectations where possible.

Though your circumstances may not change around you, you can change the inner you in the circumstances to create more energy and lift around and through them.