



## How to Regain Emotional Control

By Dr. Kathleen Begley, Book Author and Professional Speaker

*Note to Readers: Here's another offbeat e-update on business communication and current events from Write Company Plus, a corporate training firm located outside Philadelphia. In respect for your busy schedule, writers and editors have arranged seven at-a-glance ideas at the end of this article. Skip directly there if you lack the time to read the entire document.*

How about those factory workers in Chicago? Weren't they inspirational? I'm referring, of course, to the 200 men and women recently laid off from their jobs at Republic Windows and Door factory. After getting only three days notice that they were losing their jobs due to a plant closing, members of United Electrical Workers local 1110 staged a lengthy sit-in at the facility. For five days and nights, they refused to leave unless the owner paid them severance and vacation owed them under the union contract.

On Wednesday, the group emerged after the Bank of America agreed to give credit to the company for the outstanding wages and benefits. Looking bleary-eyed from lack of sleep, the former employees left chanting "Yes, we did." My guess is the workers would have preferred to get their job backs. But, the current economy being the current economy, they focused on what they could control, rather than what they could not.

Bravo! Kudos! Congratulations!

Considering the recent onslaught of dire financial news, I suspect many of you may be feeling as if your life is careening beyond your grasp. Alas, many folks make the situation even worse by trying to regain their composure by exerting dominance over the wrong people in the wrong places about the wrong things. Bosses micromanage workers. Workers bully spouses. Parents criticize children. Customers scream at sales clerks. Motorists cut off other drivers.

In the most extreme cases, tightly wound people become physically violent toward real or imagined enemies. In the horrific annals of mass murder, most killers had lost either their job or a loved one in the six months preceding their crime sprees. Having gone through my share of grief and anguish earlier in life, I know well that the people who survive and thrive in horrendous situations are those who direct their energy into trying to control themselves, not trying to control other people. The first task is hard enough. The second is impossible. Here are some ideas to keep your focus headed in the right direction, namely inward:

**Acknowledge your angst.** Unless you have studiously avoided all economic news in the past few months, I think you would be bonkers not to feel unsettled. Every time I hear the words "billions of dollars" applied to the next shocking bailout, my jaw clenches and my eyelashes flutter. Last week, as the auto industry begged for taxpayer money, I felt suspended in a state of perpetual confusion.

**Talk to your loved ones.** Instead of transferring your fears into rage over minor issues such as unswept floors or loud music, tell your family what's really bothering you. Trust me. It's not your son's messy room or your spouse's long phone conversations. Once you fess up to reality, mundane irritations gradually will subside. Truth is strength, not weakness.

**Seize the opportunity.** Back when you had a six-figure job and your investments were paying 15 percent a year, it was easy to act cheerful. The test of human beings is how you face adversity, not success. Now is that time.



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**Make a plan.** First, write down your current worries. The list may include employer downsizing, boss erraticism, retirement savings, health concerns, mortgage payments, marital problems, college tuition, weight gain, and aging parents. Then, under each topic, list actions that you can take to buttress your sense of control. If you're worried about losing your job in a cutback, for instance, you might include updating your resume, contacting recruiters, assembling letters of recommendation.

**Focus on action, not reaction.** Like tons of stressed-out people, you may have a tendency to anticipate negative outcomes so strongly that you never take the first steps toward a solution. Discipline yourself to avoid this fatal mistake. Now, more than ever, you need to place as much value on the process as on the result.

**Expect setbacks.** Although financial problems bring some people closer, they divide most. If you slip off the self-control wagon by berating your spouse for a cooking a lousy dinner or kicking the dog for growling at a passerby, ask for forgiveness. Then forgive yourself. Who said you were perfect? Economic gloom and doom means frequently having to say you're sorry.

**Visualize the consequences.** Time and time again, I've witnessed relationships break up because one of the partners continuously attempted to deny pain by emotionally pushing and shoving the other to the brink of despair. Inevitably, the second person decided enough was enough -- and moved on. Look, you've already been forced to say goodbye to your sense of economic security. Why add your friends and family to your list of losses?

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