*Deepak Chopra, co-founder of the Chopra Foundation and author of* [*Spiritual Solutions: Answers to Life's Greatest Challenges*](http://www.amazon.com/Spiritual-Solutions-Answers-Greatest-Challenges/dp/030787771X)*, reveals how to face our roughest times.*

Challenges are part of everyone's life, but there are dark moments when a challenge turns into a crisis. The outcome of our lives depends on the choices we make at those moments. Will they be breakthroughs or setbacks? What we call wisdom is a crucial tool here. Without it, people usually make their most important decisions based on impulse or its opposite, habit.

It might seem impossible that any three questions can—and should—be asked anytime things go wrong, but the sad truth is that millions of us dwell on the three questions we *shouldn't* ask, questions such as: (1) What's wrong with me? (2) Whom can I blame? (3) What's the worst-case scenario?

We all feel the urge to condemn ourselves out of guilt, to blame others for our misfortunes and to fantasize about total disaster. But these three questions will haunt you and do untold harm unless you consciously stop them, push them aside and replace them with the right questions, leading to the right actions. Here are three positive, self-affirming ways to approach your next tough situation:

**1. Is this a problem I should fix, put up with or walk away from?**

Unless you can answer this question clearly and rationally, your vision will be clouded. Without knowing it, you will be acting under the influence of negative emotions such as fear. You will give in to impulsiveness or fall back on old habits.

You must clarify your inner confusion. You must get your bearings in a reasonable way. The first step is to consider—in consultation with those you trust—a course of action that begins with finding a fix. If the fix isn't there, ask why. Perhaps someone is blocking you or you lack the resources of money and time. Yet it is always worthwhile to search for a fix and commit yourself to finding one. Only when you feel satisfied that you've exhausted your realistic options should you begin to decide between putting up with the situation (using patience, *not* passivity) and walking away.

The three alternatives are easier than they sound, because most people vacillate when things go bad. One day they wishfully hope for a fix and maybe take a few steps toward it. The next day they feel passive and victimized, so they put up with things as they are. The third day they are sick and tired of suffering and simply want to escape. The overall result is self-defeat. No solution can ever be found by running in three different directions. So clarify your situation and act on what you clearly see.

**Next:** [**The second question you need to ask**](http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Deepak-Chopra-Advice-Handling-Hard-Times/2)

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**2. Who can I consult who has solved the same problem successfully?**Bad things aren't solved in isolation, yet there is no doubt that our reactions isolate us. We become afraid and depressed. We draw into ourselves. Around the edges we entertain shame and guilt, and once these appear, there is even more reason to shut down.

Finding someone who has gone through the same crisis that you are facing accomplishes several things at once. It gives you an example to follow, a confidant who understands your plight and an alternative to withdrawing into isolation. Victims always feel alone and helpless. So reach out to someone who has proven, through their own lives, that they were not victimized by the bad thing you are facing now.

We aren't talking about hand-holding, shared misery or even therapy. All those activities can be beneficial (or not), but there's no substitute for talking to a person who has entered a dark place and come out successfully. Where do you find such a person? Ask around, tell your story, seek support groups, go online to find blogs and forums—the possibilities are much greater than ever before. And don't stop until you find not just good advice but real empathy from someone you trust.

**Next:** [**The last question you need to ask**](http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Deepak-Chopra-Advice-Handling-Hard-Times/3)

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The 3 Questions To Ask Yourself When Things Go Wrong

By Deepak Chopra

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**3. How can I reach deeper into myself for solutions?**

There is just no getting around that turning bad things into good things is up to you. No one can be there all the time, and like it or not, crises are all-consuming. You find yourself facing an inner world that is suddenly full of threats, fears, illusions, wishful thinking, denial, distractions and conflict. The world "out there" won't change until the world "in here" does.

There is a simple spiritual truth that I believe in deeply: The level of the solution is never found at the level of the problem. Knowing this, you can escape many traps that people fall into. What exists at the level of the problem? Repetitive thinking that gets nowhere. Old conditioning that keeps applying yesterday's outworn choices. Lots of obsessive thinking and stalled action. I could go on. But the relevant insight is that you have more than one level of awareness, and at a deeper level there is untapped creativity and insight.

Your higher self contains the potential for new solutions, but you must find it. Instead of "higher self," you can substitute any term that applies—soul, Atman, Holy Spirit, muse, inspiration—because linguistics are not nearly as important as the experience itself. You must experience the place inside where the light dawns and brings hope, where peace is possible and there is certainty about finding a viable path forward.

It's not a mystery that such a place can be reached, because even in the worst crisis we experience flashes of it. The trick is to be able to inhabit the level of awareness that brings solutions. First, know that this level exists. Second, make a plan to get there, through all the techniques open to everyone: meditation, reflection, contemplation, prayer. Reduce your stress by every means you can find. Seek others who understand consciousness. Read books that inspire you but also books that realistically describe what it means to go on the inward journey. I've given an abbreviated plan of action, but the important thing is that you take the first steps inside.

Of course, I can't know what bad things are happening to you specifically. I just urge you to quit the majority who live in confusion and conflict. Join the minority who see a clear path out of present darkness, who never submit to fear and despair and who in truth lead the world into a future full of light.

Read more: <http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Deepak-Chopra-Advice-Handling-Hard-Times/3#ixzz2dz5fhSbM>