

Borrowing Trouble

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“I can’t take the stress! I know she’s out to get me! What if she lies to the boss about me? I need this job!”

My client (I’ll call her Sandra here) had been concerned about her coworker for some time, but now that her coworker had been fired, Sandra was worried that her coworker might work to get her fired as well.

Sandra was, as my grandmother used to say, “borrowing trouble, as if she didn’t have enough to worry about of her own”.

In a sense, Sandra was right. All of the things she was worried about could happen. Or, they might not. Either way, there wasn’t anything she could do about something that hadn’t happened yet, and might not happen at all!

We started by examining her worries one by one, asking the following questions:

- How likely is this event to occur?
- If you knew this would happen, could you do something ahead of time to lessen its impact?
- Is there a way to tell if this event will happen in the near future?
- If you can see that it will happen soon, are you able to do anything to prevent it?
- If not, what needs to happen in the aftermath of the event? Who needs to handle the aftermath?

As we began thinking about each of her worries, Sandra started to notice a pattern. While many of her worries were not unfounded, she realized that she couldn’t predict or prevent any of them. She couldn’t prevent her former coworker from talking to her boss, and she couldn’t control what she might say.

I suggested that Sandra speak about her relationship with her former coworker to her boss, noting the difficulties they had, and especially mentioning times she tried to undermine others on their team. This would give her boss more context within which to evaluate anything her coworker might say to him later.

Once that was done, I encouraged her to continue to do her job well, and let the rest of it go. There was nothing else for her to do unless something changed, and, as my grandmother would say, there was plenty to be getting on with. So, where do you borrow trouble?

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