

Episode #27: What's the Worst That Can Happen?

Welcome to THE CAREER ACCELERATOR, the podcast where corporate managers will find tips and tools to deliver results through others.

Hello. Today I want to share a lesson I learned a few decades ago that, since then, has helped-me make difficult business and personal decisions. I'm your host, coach Percy Cannon.

In our last episode I covered the top three strengths that I have observed in successful managers, both during my close to three decades inside the corporate world, and throughout the last ten years as an executive and team coach:

1. **Leading others**, including their bosses,
2. **Being effective manager-coaches** for their direct reports, and
3. **Knowing how to lead and participate in teams.**

I suggested that you work on building or growing one or more of these three capabilities to become an even more successful manager.

How often do you face decisions that do not seem to have a clear-cut answer? Do you agonize through the process of choosing an alternative when there doesn't seem to be a good one? Related to this, today I want to talk about a personal experience that happened more than four decades ago. The lesson I learned from it continues to be as valid today as it was back then.

Upon graduating from high school, I started studying petrochemical engineering in Peru, my home country.

My first year there was not good. My school, a state university, had been suffering due to frequent strikes and instability, which had resulted in the school offering only one semester that year. In part, this was a reflection of the country going through an unstable period under a military dictatorship.

Sadly, the second year started following the same pattern as the previous one. After only a couple of weeks into it, the student riots restarted, and the school had to, one more time, suspend classes. They could not guarantee the safety of the faculty and students. Unfortunately, my engineering major was only offered in a couple of other state universities that were undergoing similar challenges. This led me to look for options abroad.

One day, fed up by the continued instability, I went to the American embassy and requested to apply for a scholarship to study in the United States. Neither my parents nor I had the resources to fund my studies abroad. I was promptly given the supply and demand reality check: There were very few scholarships available, and several dozens of students applying for them. On top of it, they told me the entire process would last a full year. Despite knowing that the odds and the calendar were against me, I went ahead and filled out the application.

During the following year, the situation at my school did not improve, so I continued to pursue the scholarship option.

One day, after several interviews, tests, and heavy paperwork, I received a phone call asking me to meet with the scholarship board. They also requested that both of my parents attend the meeting. They welcomed us with a big smile, informing us that I had been awarded a tuition scholarship to study engineering in the United States. The good news did not last long, however, as I was expected to cover the non-tuition expenses of room, board, books, and other miscellaneous costs.

I politely reminded the scholarship grantors that my family had provided the evidence that we could not cover the expenses and thus we had requested a full scholarship, not just the tuition portion. The answer, as expected, was that a tuition scholarship was all they could offer me at that time, and if I did not want to accept it, there was another student waiting in line to take my place.

I got cold feet... I requested a time-out to huddle with my parents, who were with me during the whole meeting. I told them that maybe I should stay in Peru, weather the storm at my school, and finish my studies there. I could always go later to the US to do post-graduate work. I made it clear to my parents that I was not comfortable with the offer. There was just too-much financial uncertainty around this partial scholarship offer.

It was then that my parents posed the following question:

What's the worst that can happen?

The resulting conversation can be summarized with my parents giving me the following conclusion:

Today we don't have the money to fund the full program abroad. However, based on your savings and ours, we could fund the nontuition expenses for the first year. No doubt it will be a stretch, but it's doable.

Before I could react to this statement and push back, they elaborated:

So, what's the worst that can happen? You finish your first year in the US, you run out of money, and you come back to Peru. You will have had an experience abroad that very few people in this country have. You will have significantly improved your English and you will likely be able to get credit in your current school for the courses taken abroad.

Once again, before I could counter argue, they said:

Now, can we think about what's the best that can happen? Once you get to the US, you can improve your financial situation through on-campus jobs and additional scholarships. Our financials could also improve, and we can help you as well.

After a long moment of painful reflection, I chose to accept the scholarship and study in the US. And as the saying goes, "the rest is history." The worst-case scenario never happened, and the best-case scenario did. I was able to find several part-time jobs on campus and was awarded a second scholarship, both of which allowed me to graduate as an engineer three years later.

I was fortunate to receive this timely and life-changing advice from my parents. If I had to do it all over again, I would follow the same path. In fact, I continue to ask myself this same question every time I face a fork on the road. I have also used it in my coaching practice when the executive is not clear on a specific choice he or she needs to make.

As you face one of those difficult choices in your life, consider asking yourself:

What's the worst that can happen?

I hope you enjoyed today's episode. In the next one, I will share five tips on how to become a more effective influencer. If you like what you heard today, and depending on the platform you're using, let me ask you to please rate, subscribe or follow this podcast and share it with your coworkers and friends. Also, you can request a free coaching call with me by visiting my website at www.cannon.consulting, or if available in this platform, using the link provided in the Details section.

This is coach Percy Cannon, working to help you *make the rest of your life...the best of your life*®.

Percy's BIO

Percy provides corporate managers and leadership teams with customized coaching programs that help them develop the skills and capabilities needed to significantly increase their business results through others and accelerate their career growth.

Percy is an "alumnus" from three multinational corporations, Procter & Gamble, IBM & Microsoft, with whom he spent close to three decades.

Since 2011 he has been helping corporate executives, managers and employees *make the rest of their life...the best of their life*®.

Percy has worked in the United States and across several countries in Latin America as an Executive Coach, Leadership Team Consultant and Keynote Speaker, serving companies such as Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, Citibank, Tiffany & Avianca.

Percy is a Certified Professional Coach from Wainwright Global, Authorized Partner for "The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team" and "Everything DiSC" and certified as a "Go-Giver" speaker & coach.

He published his first book in 2012-13 in English (*The Business Apostolate: Insights to Define and Achieve Your Mission in Life*) and in Spanish (*El Negocio Más Grande de su Vida*).

Percy is a Consulting Partner with Grupo Azimuth and the Chapter Director for the COO Forum in Southeast Florida.

He has lived in 9 different cities and 5 countries, and speaks English, Spanish and Portuguese fluently. Percy is married, has 3 children and 6 grandchildren, and is a passionate runner & reader.

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