

I like surprises. Well, actually I like some surprises. I like the ones where I get something out of them or when I'm able to surprise someone else with something they will enjoy.

The surprises that pop up unexpectedly that do nothing but cause problems or force me to change my plans, I wouldn't say I like those surprises at all. But are those kinds of surprises really surprises at all?

Stuff happens. Despite our best plans and attempts to prevent unexpected things from happening, they can still occur. That's why successful people and experienced leaders are prepared to deal with those "things."

The first thing I recommend doing when the unexpected happens is nothing. At least for a while. Take a breath, examine what happened as dispassionately as you can. Don't rush into a decision or take action until you understand the implications of that decision or action. It's possible, probably unlikely, but possible that no action is required at all.

The other advantage of pausing instead of panicking is you appear under control to those watching. They want to see how you respond to this unexpected situation. The reality is you're not really doing anything during this pause. You're gathering information, facts, options, and most importantly, your wits.

You'll want to determine if this is a temporary situation or a new permanent wrinkle. It's seldom wise to make permanent changes because of a temporary problem.

The second suggestion I'd offer people dealing with the unexpected is to stay positive. Your life experiences and possible business, you've likely overcome other unforeseen and unwanted situations in the past. Remind yourself of those successes because the fact is, if you've overcome the unexpected once, you can do it again.

Finally, when facing the unexpected, mainly when the unexpected includes many unknowns, I encourage people to ask for help. Knowing when to ask for help and having the courage to ask for it is not a weakness; it is a strength.

You may be tempted to think "handling" unexpected circumstances on your own makes you look like a leader, but it may make you look like the opposite. Leaders work well with other people, and lone wolves go it alone. Lone wolves make terrible leaders.

Ignoring the experience and skills of co-workers and colleagues most often makes it harder on yourself. Rule number one when dealing with the unexpected is NEVER make anything more of a challenge than it needs to be.

The next time you're facing the unexpected pause for a bit, remind yourself you've got this and seek help and advice from others. You may find that this surprise is pretty good after all.