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Preparation is the Key to Facing Whatever May Come Your Way

By Michael Preston
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Professional football coach George Allen was famously quoted as saying: “Winning is the science of being totally prepared.”

Allen was one of the most successful football coaches in the National Football League during the 1960s and ‘70s and his tenure included his Washington team making an appearance in the Super Bowl in 1973. He was known for meticulous game planning, understanding the task at hand and finding the right player to insert into the game for any given situation. He was also famous for planning and preparing based on understanding how his teams could lose and addressing weaknesses and needs instead of only concentrating on strengths.

Recently our ability to prepare and anticipate in Central Florida was tested with the arrival of Hurricane Matthew. For several days we purchased supplies, boarded up windows and gassed up cars. Then we waited for the storm’s impact.

While not everyone made it through the storm without being affected, overall the damage was minimal. But despite the wobble in the path away from the state there was evidence that Central Florida was well prepared for the storm.

Gov. Rick Scott called for mandatory beach evacuations in plenty of time for residents to get off the beaches, many schools and businesses closed early to allow employees and students to get ready for the storm, and the media kept people informed of weather conditions and where to find supplies such as bottled water and gas.

Around our house we prepared by making sure our yard was free of lawn chairs and other objects that could fly off and damage or hurt someone, our cars were gassed up in case we needed to get out of town, and we had plenty of water, batteries, and food.

We were ready; all that we needed to do was to settle in and listen for updates on the news. By the time the storm would hit we felt that even if there was damage to the house we would be ready to face it. We reviewed worst-case scenarios and how we would address them as a family, and luckily we never had to use any of it. The storm passed over and we were safe.

There is something to be said for the stress relief that being prepared gives you.

As humans we are prone to give into a thing called Catastrophic Thinking or the idea that if things will go bad, they usually do. The problem with this type of thinking is that rarely happens and then over time complacency sets in.

This is something that Martin Seligman of the U.S. Army's Resiliency Training Program hopes to guard against. If Catastrophic Thinking sets in for our troops then they can freeze up under dire circumstances and that could put them in more danger than they already are. Seligman gets his trainees to focus on positive outcomes and plan on addressing worst-case scenarios before or after an incident to help with preparing the mind for these inevitable challenges.

And obviously there are a lot of advantages of being prepared.

Life coach and certified professional trainer Angela Barnard outlined four ways being prepared can lead to better results.

First off, being prepared enhances your self-discipline. Because being prepared takes forethought, the need to be disciplined enough to think ahead can keep you on task and always looking around the corner.

Secondly, preparation allows for strategic instead of reactionary thinking. By committing to strategic thinking one can anticipate speed bumps and canyons and look for alternate routes and solutions before needing them. This type of planning allows you to react quicker than if your time were spent in reaction mode.

The third advantage is that being prepared increases mental flexibility. By putting aside the brain space to prepare we can then focus on other tasks and increase productivity in other ways. Also, it increases your ability to creatively solve problems so the exercise of preparing can also help when the thing you are unprepared for happens.

Last, being prepared increased your resiliency. If the thing you fear does happen – such as if your roof does come off in a storm – you will be more resilient if you know there is a safe place to hide in your house and you know where your homeowner's insurance policy is. If you prepare for these moments when they happen it is not as scary.

We can't prepare for every issue that will arise in our lives. There will be times when something will surprise and challenge us. However, if we are prepared, then as microbiologist Louis Pasteur said, "Good fortune favors the prepared mind."

The more prepared we are, the more likely we will come out on the winning end of a challenge.

So while Hurricane Matthew just missed us this time, don't consider that good fortune in a complacent way. Look at how you prepared and what you would do differently next time.

Because chances are we *will* see another hurricane in Central Florida and next time it might be the direct hit we fear.

But relax. You got this — you're prepared.

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