

## What If the Master Plan Fails?

Most of us, at some time during our childhood or adolescent years, dreamt about the future – a dream yet to be fulfilled. These dreams might have been fanciful whims about marrying royalty or climbing Mount Everest (not that some people have not achieved such dreams), but in most cases the dreams centred on career, family and financial aspirations. This is the “Plan A”, the Master Plan, which we took into our early adult years. For some of us, the dream was entirely ours. For others, Plan A might have been the dream that our parents may not have had the chance to fulfil for themselves, and that they wanted us to live out for them.



Some people become so attached to their Plan A, that even when it is obvious that it is not working, they persevere, continuing to invest more and more of themselves into trying to make it work. Why is it that some people just don't know when to give up? What is it that drives them so hard to succeed with their Plan A?

For some people, a failing Plan A represents a challenge that must be overcome. In other words, their attachment is primarily driven by fear. The danger for these people is that in their unrelenting commitment, they may be saying “It's my Plan A so it's going to work; I'll just invest more of me into it” (and in so doing become even more attached to it!).

For other people, the motive to keep trying to make Plan A succeed, is fear. These people are really saying “Plan A has to work – it's the only plan I have, so I must succeed”.

For yet another group of people, the underlying agenda is the protection of their ego. They might be saying “I have told so many people about my plan that I will just look plain stupid if I give up now”.

Maybe there are others again who are not driven by stubbornness, fear, or ego. This group might be driven by guilt. They might be saying “Mum and Dad were so proud of me when I told them about my life plan that I would never forgive myself for disappointing them now by showing them that I have failed”. Or perhaps they don't feel that they have been working hard enough to get the Plan to succeed.

But there comes a time when we all need to be saved from a Master Plan that is not working. This where Plan B comes into the picture. So, what is Plan B all about? Plan B is the safety net that breaks your fall when Plan A falls apart and has you plummeting towards the ground. But the safety net can only stop your fall if you already have a Plan B waiting in the wings – a plan of action that you may not wish to take in the first instance but is there waiting for you if your main plan fails. On a small scale, Plan B might be a fallback position to provide us with, for

## Counsellor's Reflections

example, short-term work whilst we find a new job, or re-financing options until we start receiving a regular income again. But Plan B might also be a total review of what we want from life! Sometimes it is the surrendering of childhood limiting thoughts and behaviours (Plan A) in order to confront and conquer huge personal challenges (Plan B) that will present you with enormous rewards, greater than you ever believed possible (or believed you were worth!!)

U.S. psychologist, Stephanie Asker, says in her book “Plan B – How To Get Unstuck from Work, Family and Relationship Problems”, that she runs her counselling practise by allowing her clients to talk about their particular issues and how these are related to the Plan A dreams that had for themselves. Then she helps them to verbalise (or in some cases to find) their Plan B. Finally, she works with her clients to help them determine whether it is worth working harder on Plan A or whether it is time to move away from Plan A and trigger Plan B. She says that just having a Plan B, without knowing when to activate it, is not an acceptable time to leave therapy.

Maybe it is time for each of us to take stock of how well Plan A is going. Perhaps, today, it is running well and that is great news. But it would be nice to check in and validate that for your own peace of mind. If that exercise left you a bit shaky, it could be time to consider what your individual Plan B could be.

So the two questions to ponder are “Do you need/have a Plan B?” and “Do you know what has to happen for you to know that it is time to retire Plan A and to initiate Plan B?”

There lies the interesting dilemma. Perhaps Plan B will deliver you greater happiness and success than Plan A was ever going to provide. Perhaps stepping back and looking for an alternative strategy could be the best thing you have done for yourself. In the words of the TV show “Providence”: “Sometimes the best things happen when the Master Plan fails”.