

What If . . . ?
A Learning Experience for Creative
Response to Threats
Ted Ward

A one-page set of five descriptions confronts the participants with circumstances that no one would want to happen. The necessity of dealing with unthinkable events and yet developing creative ideas is the nature of the encounter being simulated.

Procedure

Distribute the page with the five threats. Working *individually*, each participant is to take the following steps, one by one:

- Read all five situations and mark the “level of threat” for each.
- Select one situation that you are willing to think further about.
- Prepare short answers to these questions:
 - What could you do to help prevent the situation described?
 - Assuming that it has, in fact, happened, what would you do? Is there anything you could do to help out?

When each person has completed their individual work, form dyads (preferably two people who have prepared responses to the same situation). The task for the dyads follows. Post the instructions if necessary.

- Discuss the situation. Talk about all the things in life that would be different if this situation were to come to pass. To what extent do you think this situation is likely to happen?
- Identify three to five steps that could be taken now to make constructive and creative preparation to minimize the human hurts that are likely if this situation occurs.

When the dyads have completed their tasks, debrief the entire group. Suggested questions include the following:

- Why did you select the particular situation?
- Where you less able to imagine the likelihood certain situations? Which situations and why?
- What was your first reaction to the five situations as a whole?
- To what extent were you able to be creative and to plan constructively in the face of threats that you haven’t faced before?
- To what extent did your work on a difficult possibility stimulate or reduce your interest in planning ahead?
- What were the most common responses in the face of threats?
- What solutions seemed to have the most promise for dealing with threats?

Sample Threats (add specific details if needed for the simulation)

1. A natural disaster has occurred that seriously affected populations south of your city. Because of the scope of the disaster, the stability of the entire region is affected. How will refugees and those displaced by the disaster be accommodated? What are the possible threats in caring for these refugees and the displaced? Because of the scope of the disaster, the area is likely to be uninhabitable for a year or more. What are the prospects for the future and in what areas?

Level of Threat:	High	Medium	Low
To my family			
To me			
To my livelihood			
Other _____			

2. The economic stability of the country has collapsed. Few people have any savings left. Especially hard hit are retirees, and many are starving. In the last cold spell, the media reported that thousands froze death in the northern states. Rural populations are surviving by trading goods for other things needed. Foreclosures are common; unemployment is increasing; law and order is threatened.

Level of Threat:	High	Medium	Low
To my family			
To me			
To my livelihood			
Other _____			

3. The Supreme Court has ruled that the doctrine of separation of church and state is violated when churches are given any sort of assistance in tax exemption. The ruling includes a specific prohibition of tax credits and deductions from gross income of contribution to churches or church-related schools. Funds for churches and church-based education have been seriously reduced.

Level of Threat:	High	Medium	Low
To my family			
To me			
To my livelihood			
Other _____			

4. A major city in your region is under siege from gangs. The tension is exacerbated by localized racial conflict. The Governor of your region has declared martial law and imposed a curfew. No gatherings are permitted. Churches, theaters, and in some instances schools have been closed.

Level of Threat:	High	Medium	Low
To my family			
To me			
To my livelihood			
Other _____			

5. The cut off of imported petroleum has resulted in federal rules on energy use. Most air conditioning has been shut down. Gasoline is available only to health services, food distributors, farmers and industry. Private cars are rarely permitted fuel. Even school buses are being phased out. People are uneasy about what else will be cut in the private sector in order to allow an industrial core to survive.

Level of Threat:	High	Medium	Low
To my family			
To me			
To my livelihood			
Other _____			