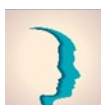


TRANSCENDING PERSONAL APOCALYPSE

Replace Your Beliefs,
Revitalize Your Future



Douglas Breitbart & Fabián Szulanski



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PROLOGUE

As proud baby boomers, hailing from two different continents, with a handful of hats and careers under each of our respective belts; we have found ourselves and many of our friends, colleagues, and acquaintances sharing a common experience.

That experience is being confronted with a profound life-disrupting event; and recovery from it being elusive despite one's best efforts to do so.

We have coined the term *Personal Apocalypse* ("PA") to describe a life event that is experienced as personally devastating and catastrophic. That impact is often invisible to others around us.

We see many struggling with the aftermath of these PA events in their lives today. The effects can be emotional, physical, spiritual, cognitive, behavioral, circumstantial, and sensorial.

In exploring the impacts of PAs, the person affected can be fully engaged and proactive in addressing what has happened; and yet their best efforts and attempts to recover persistently fail.

We have sought to unpack: the most common events; the experiential impacts on individual awareness and effectiveness; and the root causes of the chronic frustration that can arise from failing to achieve the desired result.

We have also sought to feel into and share our take on these experiences from the inside out, from a reader's perspective of being stuck in a post-PA life.

Our goal is to help those wrestling with post-PA challenges to make sense of their life and unique circumstances, and unpack and reframe their path forward.

This book is not intended as a prescriptive checklist or recipe for how to recover from PA events. What is shared is based on our and others' discoveries about the "why" behind what may not be working in one's life, in the wake of a PA.

As we peel the onion, we recognize that any one layer may or may not resonate. However, we hope that you may find valuable takeaways that serve as a doorway through which a new awareness can emerge.



HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED A PA?

Have you experienced a significant life event, either within or outside of your control, that has left you feeling as if the world has dissolved from under your feet? Has the impact of this experience left you without any familiar landmarks or means to cope with your new reality in a sustainable way?

Have you or are you experiencing feelings of being lost, powerless, anxious, or afraid; with a frustrating inability to make sense or see a path forward?

Have you found yourself repeatedly returning to the same strategies or solutions that have proven to be ineffective, in the hope that this time it will work?

If you have answered yes to any or all of the above, then it is highly likely you may have experienced a PA event.



What is a Personal Apocalypse?

Many of us experience times or events in our lives when all that we know and believe vanishes before our eyes. This can be sudden, as with a personal health crisis or automobile accident, or over time, as with an impending layoff or loss of a loved one.

There can be many life events that have an apocalyptic impact. Some are within our control, and others are completely outside of our control. Some are rooted in work; others rooted in family or personal relationships; and some simply are a result of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Some may be the result of a natural disaster, or of our own choices and actions.

An “apocalypse,” generically speaking, is an event involving disruption, destruction or damage on an awesome or catastrophic scale.

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What elevates an event to Personal Apocalypse status is the feeling that one's life and belief system is completely shaken on a catastrophic level. It is the magnitude of the impact on an individual's emotional, cognitive and embodied self-experiential level that determines whether or not it rises to the level of a PA, not the intrinsic magnitude of the event itself.

What constitutes a Personal Apocalypse to one may not be a personal apocalypse to another.

*A Personal Apocalypse
is not defined by the event itself; but
rather by the experiential impact of the event
on the individual.*

The following list offers some events that could serve as the source for experiencing a PA.

Work Related

- Employment
 - Firing or layoff
 - Employer collapse
- Self-Employed
 - Loss of clients, customers or market demand
 - Expertise or skill set commoditization or obsolescence
 - Lack of required knowledge or know-how

Personal

■ Personal crisis

- Death
- Divorce
- Homelessness
- Bankruptcy
- Health crisis
- Spiritual crisis
- Identity crisis
- Economic crisis
- Empty nest

■ Accidents

- Motor vehicle
- Personal injury
 - Assault
 - Machinery
 - Weapons
 - Athletic

■ Social isolation

- Circumstantial
 - Detention
 - Incarceration
 - Incapacitation
 - Banned from online communities.
 - Banned from social networks.
- Geographic

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- Remote location
 - Deportation
 - Forced migration
 - Immigration
 - Technological
 - Blocked from internet access.
 - Lack of connectivity or hardware
 - Discriminatory
 - Gender
 - Race
 - Ethnic origin
 - Faith
 - Sexual identity
 - Appearance
 - Challenge
 - Political orientation
- Consequences of choices & actions
- Failed investments
 - Bad selection of:
 - Partners
 - Friends
 - Clients

Disasters

- Natural
- Pandemics
 - Flood

- Fire
- Earthquake
- Tsunami
- Volcano
- Storms

■ Manmade

- Political collapse
- Economic collapse
- Social disintegration
- Technology failure
- Civil disorder
- Military conflict



PA Events Versus Other Significant Life Events

There are many transformational life events that can carry with them a sense of profound loss or significant fear, but do not rise to the level of a PA.

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For some, the birth of a first child, or the prospect of getting married can provoke significant anxiety. However, it would be less likely that they would be experienced as traumatic by most people.

A PA will involve significant psychological, physical, or circumstantial loss, often on a large scale. It will also tend to trigger fear, as an immediate and reflexive response.

PA events are often unexpected, in terms of timing. Even if I know that I am at risk of being fired, the actual moment I receive notice is outside of my control.

Events leading up to the PA may be sudden and completely without warning, or they can be internalized over a longer period of time, without triggering an attempt at avoidance.

An example might be like a tsunami appearing on the horizon where people stand and stare, not recognizing the danger until the wave is upon them. The moment of truth is something that defies preparation or avoidance.

As with the timing above, the magnitude of reaction to an apocalyptic event can be completely unpredictable and unforeseen.

This book may not be helpful for someone in the middle of an apocalyptic event. Conversely, it also may not provide value to someone already well on the road to recovery after such an event.

This book is most helpful for those who find themselves still alive and kicking in the wake of experiencing a PA but find it extremely challenging to get traction and movement toward building a new life.



The PA Impact

Each of us has our own unique experiential “operating system.” The vulnerability of that operating system to a crash is also unique to each of us. The threshold for when a PA becomes personally and profoundly affecting is just as unique.

The magnitude of the reaction to an apocalyptic event can be immediate or delayed, conscious or unconscious, completely debilitating or not, numbing or nightmarish, episodic or recurrent.

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The common thread is that these experiences are not within our control; and, they can often defy any efforts to assert control or resistance over their effects.

Extreme cases are beyond the scope of this book, and we defer to clinical and psychological professionals for those affected. This would be as in the case of those diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In these cases specialized treatment is required.

The reason for qualifying these extreme consequences as falling outside of our scope, is that the people suffering from these conditions may, in the moment, lack the capacity to engage in a process of life reconstruction, until they have gotten past the trauma of the apocalyptic event itself.

For a significantly larger number of people subjected to a PA in their lives, the effects are often completely internalized for the individual, and they are often invisible to others in their life.

Someone who experiences a PA can react either from a place of acceptance or denial. Those around the person can react from a place of acknowledgment and caring, or denial and judgment, with the latter exacerbating the post-PA impacts.

Regardless of the magnitude of the impact experienced, it can be valuable to seek advice and support from others. This can be friends, family, professional service providers, faith-based support providers, peer support communities, books, courses, workshops, and programs.

Using these resources carries no judgment nor stigma. The very real impact of a PA in one's life is no less significant than any other emergent experience.

We do not hesitate to call a doctor, or emergency plumber or electrician, when the need arises. It is second nature. However, in the face of a PA, the instinct is to go to self-judgment or shame, and resist reaching out for help.



The Natural Post-PA Response

The natural response to a PA can be to experience significant stress, fear, and disorientation, often

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accompanied by an all-consuming sense of powerlessness and isolation.

In today's culture, our value and identity are inextricably tied to our productivity, the achievement of tangible results, and our accomplishments. The experience of the loss of a job or obsolescence of a skill or profession can be just as devastating as the loss of our home in a natural disaster.

Personal losses, whether of a spouse, due to an accident or a personal health crisis, can strike at the core of our beliefs about self-worth, identity, confidence, abilities, and understanding of our place in the world.

This can be made worse by self-judgment(s) or judgments of others- of failure, inadequacy and direct personal responsibility. Not just for what happened and its related consequences, but for our failure to successfully avoid it, or to navigate successfully through it.

Many cultures place a huge premium on "looking good." This can be expressed by our appearance, our possessions, our social status, or our activities. Attempting to keep up with these expectations can amplify the emotional crisis caused by a PA.

Socio-cultural pressures and expectations of those around us, both real and imagined, can serve to increase the pressure to immediately move into action. This, often in service to maintaining the appearance of normality and success.

Each context, whether work, family, friends, followers, clubs, or religious institutions, carries its own unique set of expectations and demands.

Maintaining a façade of credibility and success post-PA is a heavy burden and a tax on time and attention critically needed to meet immediate challenges; and, it is a drain on physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual strength and resilience.

The effect of social pressure diminishes the capacity for self-reflection and the capacity to process the emotional and spiritual effects.

Encouraging action, rather than supporting the grieving and processing time that is necessary, reinforces the influence and impact of the PA.

Another example of these effects on judgment can be distorted perceptions that result in exaggerated or diminished responsiveness to incoming signals and new situations.

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Everything from listening and comprehension, to responding and interacting with others can be affected, thus resulting in insensitive, or inappropriate understanding, and causing harmful or destructive actions and unintended consequences.

In the midst of the post-PA experience, whether at full force immediately after, or as a slow boil over time, we are culturally expected to rise from the ashes, rally, and find the clarity, strength and ability to triumph and achieve a miraculous recovery.

Tales of those who have overcome the most horrendous personal traumas and tragedies abound, with heroic successes and achievements. These stories can be the source of both powerful inspiration and motivation.

There is an old adage that says, “if you compare your inside to someone else’s outside, you will always lose.” Under the PA’s influence, the tendency to compare oneself with others can be amplified and exaggerated, deepening self-judgment and self-criticism.

This self-reinforcing self-judgment and self-condemnation anchors the focus on what was pre-PA, and what has been lost. The result is a diversion of energy and resources from responding to the present

circumstance. Living with our eyes glued to the rear-view mirror reinforces the grip of the PA.

When we focus on the past, our future is colored by the PA story we construct for ourselves. Lots of opportunities and possibilities are swept off the table by fears and unfounded beliefs, such as, “I am too old to pursue this,” “I cannot learn this at my age,” or “It is too late for me to start all over.”