

Real Life: Preparing for the 7 Most Challenging Days of Your Life

By Dr. Phil McGraw

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The #1 *New York Times* bestselling advice guru, Dr. Phil McGraw, presents a practical and inspiring guide to overcoming life's seven biggest crises.

Sooner or later, every adult faces a potentially devastating situation. Dealing with the stress of a traumatic event—whether it's the loss of a loved one or a sudden illness—requires skills and insights very different to those used to manage day-to-day turbulence. And no author is as equipped as Dr. Phil to guide readers in navigating their most trying moments.

With his trademark calm and prescriptive approach, Dr. Phil divides these life-altering events into seven categories—including loss, fear, adaptability (or lack thereof), physical and mental health—and then teaches readers how to take control in each case. He identifies the different problems that can arise during crisis, from forced changes in plans to fraught emotions to indecision, and shows how to overcome them, step by step.

Real Life offers advice both on preparing for extreme moments and for dealing with those situations that occur with absolutely no warning. Sensible yet reassuring, it's filled with lessons, anecdotes, and thoughtful advice that will make the difference between coping with and conquering a problem, even on life's very worst days.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Dr. Phil McGraw is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Family First*, *The Ultimate Weight Solution*, *Life Strategies*, *Relationship Rescue*, and *Self Matters*. One of the world's foremost experts in the field of human functioning, he is the host of the nationally syndicated television show *Dr. Phil*. He and his family live in Los Angeles.

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Prep Talk

Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.
-- John Lennon

If we are fortunate in our lives, somewhere along the way we encounter at least a few special people who change us in powerful, positive, and sometimes unexpected ways. These individuals, although wise, are sometimes not at all persons you would consciously seek out for counsel. One such person I was blessed to have in my life was a flight instructor I met back in the sixties, a man from whom I expected to learn how to get airborne and nothing more. I could not have been more wrong, because he proved to be one of the great "gifts" in my life.

Bill was, by his own account and all appearances, just a good ol' flying cowboy without a lot of formal education who happened to love anything that had to do with flying. But his contributions to my life ultimately proved to include much more than flying, as this very book will attest.

I was just a teenager when I started taking lessons, but he "saw" into my future in that airplane. About the time I was finishing my training, he told me that I had checked all the boxes, done all the drills, met all of the requirements, and could certainly go get my license and wing happily off into the wild blue yonder. He then paused and said something that really got my attention. I have never forgotten that moment standing next to the plane on a grass landing strip outside a small town in north Texas. "Phil," he said, "you've got the basics, you know how to get 'er up and down and around the 'patch,' and frankly you ain't half bad. But I have come to know you, and I know just as sure as I'm standing here that you are going to need more than you got. You won't play at this flying stuff, you will attack it and make it a big part of your life rather than flying to Grandma's house on a nice clear Sunday afternoon. You're going to be out there 'mixing it up' come rain or come shine, daylight or dark, and that's okay, but the truth is things just happen when you mix it up. Maybe it will be your fault for being too aggressive, or maybe you will just be in the wrong place at the wrong time, but chances are that somewhere along the way this plane will carry you into a crisis. When you are airborne, all you've got is yourself. You'd have to depend on who you are, and if you aren't prepared for it ahead of time you can *die* in this airplane. So it's up to you -- but know that it may come and if it does, you will be one of two types of pilots: one who was ready and survives to tell the story, or one who wasn't and doesn't."

He didn't wait for a response; he had spoken his piece and that was that. Even then I realized the significance of that exchange, mostly because he had just spoken more words than I had ever heard him say at once in the

entire time I had known him. Now, you have to understand here that I was a teenager in the worst sense of the word. I suspect a lot of people who knew me then probably figured I had eaten a lot of paste as a child! Boy oh boy, did I have ants in my pants to "sky up" and go for it. Yet for some reason (and certainly out of character for me), I actually listened to his wise counsel. We weren't even *almost* done because I wasn't even *almost* prepared for when things would go wrong, and though I didn't know it then, they would in fact go wrong -- way wrong.

Fast-forward four years and several hundred hours of flying later. I took off in a high-performance single-engine airplane just before midnight (some would call such behavior crazy) and on the heels of a strong winter storm that had blown through the Midwest like a freight train (some would repeat themselves). The flight started like every other I had flown, but it ended very differently. I was cruising at 10,000 feet when all of a sudden the engine just quit -- and I mean *quit*. It didn't sputter, it just quit. The sky was pitch black without even the tiniest sliver of moon to illuminate it, and there were two feet of fresh snow blanketing the ground so that everything below me looked one-dimensional. I couldn't tell the difference between the houses, fields, and roads, and there was no horizon to use as a guide. The silence was deafening, making me feel utterly and totally alone. I couldn't pull over as I could if I had car trouble, and I couldn't grab a life preserver. I had just five minutes to work with -- that's 300 seconds. The clock was ticking, I was going down -- no negotiation, no maybe, I was going down. Whether I lived or died would be determined by the grace of God and what I did in those 300 seconds. There was no time to panic or call someone on the ground. Looking back, I realize that I probably went into a kind of "internal autopilot." All my training and preparation kicked in. During those additional training exercises I had completed at Bill's behest, he must have had me simulate emergency dead-stick landings dozens and dozens of times, some during the day, some in the black of night. And in that cockpit, as I quickly came to grips with my situation, I heard his voice in my mind: *Fly first, navigate second, and communicate last...the clock is ticking.* I felt very alone, but I calmed myself with the fact that I had prepared completely for this *exact* situation -- my emergency just meant that all those practice drills were for a purpose. It was now "showtime." Let me tell you, that night I learned that there are just some things in life that come down to you and everything that's inside you. That's it; that's the deal.

An old joke among pilots (which wasn't very funny that night) is that any landing you walk away from is a good one. I flew that airplane-turned-glider for those 300 seconds with more purpose and focus than anything I had ever done in my life. It was a "good" landing because I did walk away. I'd love to say I swaggered away like John Wayne in *The High and Mighty*, whistling and slapping the wing as I left. But the truth is, I was so shaken and scared I was having trouble getting either one of my feet to cooperate in any way that even *resembled* walking. That five minutes of my life changed me forever, but it was all the preparation that led up to those five minutes that allowed me to make the right choices when it counted. If Bill hadn't cared enough to tell me the truth as he saw it, if he hadn't inspired and helped me get ready for what was ahead, I have no doubt I would not be here now, typing these words.

I know now that the outcome on that cold and dark winter's night was determined long before I ever took off. I survived not because I was lucky or because I was some great, macho pilot, cheating death with flair and panache. I survived because I had listened, because I had done my homework; I was prepared for the crisis before it happened. That night built into me a sense of confidence that if I prepared myself for the emergencies and crises that I would most likely face in life, I could at least influence their outcomes as well.

I hope that you never find yourself in a crisis like I was in that night. But we both know that while your crises will probably be different in both form and substance, they may already be on your schedule. The question is: Will you be ready? Will you have done your homework for yourself and those you love? Just like my night in the airplane, the outcome will probably be determined by what you do or don't do between now and then. So this is as good a time as any to start thinking about those days in life we would rather skip.

REAL LIFE BRINGS REAL PROBLEMS

Sometimes I wish I could predict, and even control, the future but I can't, and neither can you.

Nobody has a "Get out of jail free" card. Although I have identified seven of the most common crises, you may have a list of five or ten more. There is no magic number, but I wanted to focus on the ones that, in my experience, you are most likely to encounter either yourself or through a loved one. They are likely to happen whether you've got an eighth-grade education or a Ph.D. They may happen whether you walk the red carpet or clean carpets for a living. They may happen whether you're in a big city, living life in the fast lane, or in the woods, moving at a snail's pace.

That means we are left to manage, adapt to, and survive what does come. Unfortunately, some people just knee-jerk react to what pops up in front of them. Some choose to live in stark denial, deluding themselves into believing that if they just don't think about the inevitable and undeniable crises of life, maybe they just won't happen. I think Scarlett O'Hara expressed it best: "I can't think about that right now -- if I do, I'll go crazy. I'll think about that tomorrow." Well, frankly, Scarlett, my dear, those tomorrows *do* come, and if you haven't prepared for them, those tomorrows can kick your butt. You will see that these strategies (or more accurately, non-strategies) can come at a very high price.

Even though we may not like to think about it, we all know that life is unpredictable. We can't expect that, just because yesterday was sunny, it won't rain today or tomorrow. A part of us always maintains a watchful eye, and no matter how well things seem to be going now, there can be the underlying nagging thought: Will the "other shoe" drop? And the truth is "yes," the other shoe probably will drop at some point. I say this not as a pessimist, but as a realist and a coach, so that you may decide to do what it takes to have the peace that comes from being ready when it does.

If I had waited until that night at 10,000 feet to make a plan, it would have been way too late. When one of these seven days does arrive, I would want you to be able to say, "This is a crisis that I have prepared myself for. I'm at a fork in the road, and I can either panic and fall apart or I can use all of my skills and preparation to manage this day. The choice is mine." Of course, the only way you can say that is if you are the person with a plan, the person who did their homework. The time to think about what you're...

From AudioFile
Dr. Phil's familiar wisdom gets new life in this arresting primer on how to be ready for seven specific challenges of living. Advice such as be responsible, think honestly, and take independent action sounds more achievable when linked to concrete problems many of us can expect to face. Casting these problems as unwanted intruders, the writing stirs up combative energy that people can use to start taking control of their lives. Phil McGraw shares the reading with two talented narrators whose performances perfectly mirror the author's pacing as well as his ever-present belief that we have what it takes to get our lives in order. The belief of all three narrators in the advice they deliver makes this a ten-hour wake-up call you'll want to hear again and again. T.W. © AudioFile 2009, Portland, Maine

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From reader reviews:

Christine Frazier:

This Real Life: Preparing for the 7 Most Challenging Days of Your Life book is absolutely not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you get by reading this book will be information inside this guide incredible fresh, you will get info which is getting deeper you actually read a

lot of information you will get. This particular Real Life: Preparing for the 7 Most Challenging Days of Your Life without we recognize teach the one who examining it become critical in considering and analyzing. Don't be worry Real Life: Preparing for the 7 Most Challenging Days of Your Life can bring once you are and not make your carrier space or bookshelves' turn out to be full because you can have it inside your lovely laptop even phone. This Real Life: Preparing for the 7 Most Challenging Days of Your Life having excellent arrangement in word in addition to layout, so you will not truly feel uninterested in reading.

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Rodolfo Rodgers:

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