

# Postcards from Professional Paradise



## Your Passport to Professional Paradise

### *This Year's Flying Leap*



Each year when I get together with a small group of my sorority sisters from college for a reunion, we courageously jump off my friend's boat house into Lake Burton in north Georgia yelling, "*Carpe Diem!*" (*Seize the Day*).

Each year, I'm scared. I'm scared *before* I jump even though I know it's safe and many others have done it before me.

In my house, we call this "*borrowing trouble*."

Julie K. Norem, PhD, a professor of psychology at Wellesley College calls this "**defensive pessimism**" and says it is very helpful. She says, "Defensive pessimism involves lowering expectations to help prepare oneself for the worst, and then mentally playing through all the bad things that might happen." ([www.wellesley.edu](http://www.wellesley.edu))

So the question is, can "borrowing trouble" be helpful or is it a version of an internal **POW**? (A "POW" is a proverbial heavy blow. An internal POW is a heavy blow you give yourself). One strategy to get to and stay in **Professional Paradise** that I share with my audiences is to decrease your internal POWs. I think that many of us POW ourselves much more often than others POW us. While having this discussion, a participant in a recent workshop shared this story.

Richard (not his real name), was in his boss's office getting something and saw a note that said, "*Richard should go*".

**POW!**

He immediately had a sinking feeling in his stomach. Was he going to be laid off? He started to think about all the ramifications of an impending lay off. He was nervous and edgy the rest of the day. He was thinking, "*Why me? I better update my resume, contact old colleagues, etc.*"

His boss arrived back in the office and asked him to come in and sit down. Richard nervously joined him. The boss said, "*Richard, there's a professional conference coming up and I think you should go.*" Richard smiled inwardly - the note meant something completely different than he had assumed and he was relieved to say the least.

*Was Richard's initial reaction to the note **defensive pessimism** or an **internal POW**?*

I say if you don't know the ending to a story, then **write a happy one**. In the absence of knowledge of the outcome,

why create internal POWs by assuming the worst case scenarios? So many times, thinking the worst doesn't help us with contingency planning, it just causes us to worry and that leads to stress responses like headaches, sleepless nights, aching backs, etc. Perhaps defensive pessimism is helpful if you're evacuating before an impending hurricane or planning a large business meeting with many moving parts. But for most of us, there's plenty of "real" bad news so spending time worrying about "maybe" bad news seems unproductive to me.

I think Dr. Norem and I might just have to agree to disagree. Your homework for today's *Postcard* is to decide what you think?

When you experience that next internal POW - from a perceived threat (like jumping off the boat house), should you *SHIFT* it to a WOW (jump in yelling "*Carpe Diem*") or should you ponder the unforeseen worries (*What if there's a scary fish lurking? What if the water is really cold? What if....?*)

Only you know what's best for you.  
And I'd love to hear what you decide!

Signing off from Professional Paradise-



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