

When Your Plan Fails – Be Humble and Watch the Magic Unfold

Last summer I learned about the power of humility. My family and I traveled through South America, from the beaches of Rio to the peaks of the Andes. In the end, we were tourists – but we were not foreigners.

When we landed in Rio de Janeiro, I had our family's itinerary mapped out. The days would be packed with sights, the evenings open to adventure, and I was ready to put my college Spanish to use. It sounded like a good plan ... until our Uber driver at the Rio airport asked, "Where to?" He spoke so fast, I realized Spanish doesn't easily translate to Portuguese, the streets were jammed, his driving was frightening, my kids were hungry, and I was exhausted from the flight. Within minutes of setting foot in Brazil, I realized I had to adjust my expectations.

Not a problem. As a business consultant who steps into new work cultures all the time, I'm used to switching plans to accomplish goals. Sure, like most people in a new work environment, I want to be prepared and composed. I want to be ready for anything, have a direction, and actualize ideas and opportunities. But the truth is that whether in a corporate board room or unfamiliar city streets, we're all human. At the end of the day, the human element will always trump any plan. There's no sense in resisting the inevitable.

This is exactly what happened when I set foot in Brazil. Instead of pushing my own personal intentions or driving my ideas on what to see or do, I opened up and observed my new environment. I set aside my preconceptions and shifted gears. To feel comfortable in the new surroundings, I revised my approach (and itinerary!). I observed without judgment and looked for common ground. And what a beautiful world I saw! Things didn't go like I thought they would, but – once I let go of my agenda – everything worked out even better than expected.

And, I've seen that it works the same way in a corporate environment. Instead of following a preset direction, it pays to feel out the territory first. Look how things are done. Notice what's working and where there are pitfalls in the processes. Where does communication break down? Don't judge, but rather observe, distill, and then respond. Gather your resources, analyze the situation, and regroup.

I've discovered that coming from a place of curiosity instead of knowing all the answers builds trust and gives you the chance to gain more meaningful insights. When we move beyond pretension and be exactly who we are, everyone senses the difference. When stepping into a new work environment, traveling overseas, or simply living life (!!), it helps to be flexible. This humble approach allows you to deviate from the plan and try something new. Surprising, magical rewards come when you, are you.



A passionate organizer of people and initiatives, Erica Smigielski brings over twenty years of experience in project leadership to financial software and SaaS companies who want to launch their next big idea. She leads large-scale, complex projects like product launches and company mergers and acquisitions as well as focused efforts to bring structure and process to fast-track businesses. Erica holds certifications as a Stanford Advanced Project Manager as well as a Certified Group Facilitator, making her a master orchestrator of strategic planning, as well as a skillful communicator who can expertly navigate complex group dynamics.