

How to Eat an Elephant

The Lessons of the Survivors Club

At least 80 percent of us react in the same way to a life or death crisis or emergency: we're simply **overwhelmed** - the **challenge** seems too great, the problem insolvable. In Air Force survival school, they try to teach you how to **overcome** this feeling. One of the things they ask new cadets is, "How would you eat an elephant?" and they make them memorize the right answer, which is: "You eat an elephant one bite at a time." Survival means dealing with a huge life-or-death problem, one that you may not be able to solve quickly or all at once. The key to survival is to slow down and divide the challenges into small, **manageable tasks**, one goal at a time, one decision at a time. When an avalanche buried the survivors of a plane crash in the Andes, the survivors whispered to each other, "Breathe. Breathe again. With every breath you are alive." In a hopeless situation without oxygen or light, this strategy kept them going until they found a way out.

This and much more is what survival expert Ben Sherwood tells us in his best-selling book *The Survivors Club*, which brings together stories of real-life survivors from all kinds of disasters. He begins by explaining the 10-80-10 principle. When faced with an emergency, 80 percent of people freeze. They are **stunned** and "turn into statues" or are so **bewildered** by what is happening around them that they can't react. 10 percent lose control. These people scream and cry, and often make the situation worse. But 10 percent **keep calm** and behave in a **rational** way. They don't panic and they assess the situation clearly and make decisions. These people have the best chance of survival in a crisis, and Sherwood explains how you can try to become more like them.

He also reminds us that, apart from staying calm and not despairing, knowing the right thing to do in a crisis is also vital, and that in most emergencies many more people survive than don't. For example, most people think that you can't survive a plane crash, but American research has shown that the survival rate in all air crashes is historically 95.7 percent. Sherwood not only tries to show us how to behave rationally and calmly, he also gives us the information we need to join "The Survivors Club."

Task 1: Answer the following questions in your own words.

1. What is the key to surviving in a life or death crisis?
 - a. Keep calm and behave in a rational way.
2. What is the 10-80-10 principle?
 - a. 10 percent lost control, 80 percent of people freeze and 10 percent keep calm.
3. What is the other important factor aside from keeping calm?
 - a. They don't panic and they assess the situation clearly and make decisions.
4. What is the answer to the question "How do you eat an elephant?" and what does it mean in a survival context?
 - a. One bite at a time.

Task 2: Look at the highlighted words and phrases in the text and try to figure out what they mean from context. Match the words with their definitions and write them in the spaces below.

1. Adj. - Unable to react because the emotion is too strong.
a. OVERWHELMED
2. Adj. - So shocked that you cannot think clearly or act.
a. STUNNED
3. Noun - A new or difficult thing that tests your abilities.
a. CHALLENGE
4. Adj. - Very confused.
a. BEWILDERED
5. Adj. - Based on reason and not emotion.
a. RATIONAL
6. Verb - To succeed in dealing with or controlling a problem.
a. OVERCOME
7. Verb - To not get excited or nervous, to not panic.
a. KEEP CALM
8. Noun - Pieces of work that are possible to deal with or control.
a. MANAGEABLE TASKS