

"THE FIRST RULE OF HOLES... ... IF YOU ARE IN ONE, STOP DIGGING."

(Title Quote by Molly Ivins, Columnist)

By Doug Kelley, CSL • March 2001
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FEAR gnawed at my soul; anxiety ran high. As sweat dripped from my brow, I felt like there was nowhere to turn. Worry lines flashed across my forehead as I sunk deeper and deeper into a swirling vortex. Yep, I was having an "in-the-hole experience."

Many times, owning your own business is no picnic, especially in the first few years. Now I was faced with too much payroll, and not enough cash in the bank to cover it. What would I do?

Have you ever been in a hole? Are you in one now? We've all been in one hole or another at various times in our lives, and many they are. One of the more common holes we can get into is a financial hole, as I did. Or, if we are in sales, we can get into a hole in the form of a sales slump. We can even get into a hole with a relationship.

On the other hand, sometimes life throws us spinning out of control into a hole because of circumstances beyond our control, such as the death of a child, parent, or friend. And then there is living with the effects of another's drinking, or even childhood sexual abuse, among many others.

The foregoing notwithstanding, it could be argued that many times, if not most of the time, we alone are the ones digging the holes we get into. This being the case, we have to ask ourselves, "Am I digging this hole with a hand shovel or a backhoe?" Size matters when it comes to the effect a hole can have in our lives. For example, there is a big difference between a pothole in the road and a grave (which is the final hole we'll get ourselves into!).

HOW HOLES AFFECT OUR LIVES

Think about a time when you were in a hole—I mean *really think* about it. What were your emotions? How did you feel? The times I was in a hole, I felt discouraged, powerless, and stuck. I felt out of control—as if life was running me, and not the other way around. I felt clouded in my thinking and unsure of what to do to get out.

Life is certainly not easy when we find ourselves in a hole. A hole is really a form of adversity, and can affect our mental and emotional well-being. This is especially so if we remain in a hole for an extended period of time. If you find yourself in a hole now, don't be too discouraged, there are some things you can do to get out.

STOP DIGGING AND BACKFILL

If you are in a hole now, the most important thing you can do is ask yourself, "Why?" What got you into a hole? Was it due to some mistake? If so, what was the mistake? What led up to it? You effectively stop digging when you discover what got you into a hole in the first place, and then learn the lesson contained therein. This means you cease behaving in the way you did when you got in the hole to begin with.

Once you identify what got you into a hole, you must learn the lesson so you don't unwittingly repeat it in the future. Take this lesson and file it in the "cubbyhole" of life-lessons learned. Revisit these lessons often so you never forget them, after all, holes come with a price, and sometimes a high price.

One of life's realities is that it can take a relatively short time to dig a hole, but a long time to get out of it. This is why it is so important that you discover the lessons and realize all the benefits possible with your in-the-hole experience.

Now that you have stopped digging, you must set yourself to the business of backfilling the hole and climbing out. How you go about backfilling your hole varies depending on the type of hole you are in, and it can take time. If in a financial hole, backfilling might necessitate getting a second job, a higher paying job, living with fewer comforts for awhile, or all of the above. Getting out of a hole requires some creative problem-solving. Try the following steps in your backfilling efforts:

1. **IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM.** Identify exactly why you are in a hole and what led up to it.
2. **DISSECT THE PROBLEM.** Tear it apart. Was it some mistake? or inexperience? or fear? or several different things? Continue asking "Why?" until you arrive at the core reason(s). Write the reasons down on paper for clarity. *Important!* Note and learn the lessons of your in-the-hole experience.
3. **DEFINE ALL POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.** Outline all possibilities. Develop strategies. Don't forget to consider ALL possible solutions, no matter how unlikely they may seem. Then ponder the exact opposite of what you think the solution is. Confide in a trusted friend to help draw you out.
4. **IMPLEMENT YOUR BEST SOLUTION.** Reassess and adjust course along the way if necessary. There is no harm in readjusting your strategy if your original solution doesn't pan out. (For a more comprehensive discussion of creative problem-solving, see the book, *The Game Rules for Life*, by Doug Kelley, chapter 10, or read the article entitled, "Using the 180 Principle for Creative Problem-Solving" at www.EmpowerTheSpirit.com).

It will no doubt take hard work to get out of the hole, and that is why it is so important that you learn the lesson(s) so you are wiser from the experience and don't do a repeat performance. After all, I'm sure you'll agree that you need a hole in life like you need a "hole in the head!"

Are there times and circumstances in which you are never able to get out of the hole completely? Perhaps. But if you feel this is the case, you have to ask yourself if it is really an in-the-hole experience, or simply a pothole in the road of life? Are you really in a hole? or possibly tunneling to a better place?

For example, has your being in this hole made you a better person? Has it taught you valuable lessons in some area, such as business or life? Has it made you more attuned to the human condition, in turn making you less judgmental, more tolerant, and kinder to others? Has it resulted in you "adding to the woodpile of life" instead of taking away? In other words, are you making a positive contribution to the world around you because of it? If so, then you have done well! You have learned the lessons contained, and grown as a result. Good for you! You have heeded "The Last Rule of Holes: When you are in one, GET OUT!"

GIVE ME NEITHER HOLES NOR MOUNTAINS

It's clear that getting into a hole is undesirable, so we might conclude that what we really want in life is the opposite of a hole. But is this really the way to go? Think about what the opposite of a hole really is—a mountain. And just like holes, mountains are obstacles too. Sometimes in life, we may not be in a hole, but we might be facing a mountain-like obstacle in achieving our goals and dreams.

By their very nature, mountains are quite different than holes in most respects, but the effects can be similar, that is, keeping us from moving forward. Mountains are usually some real or imagined roadblock to getting where we want to go, and, similar to holes, they usually arise due to our inexperience. Once we learn how to traverse the mountain, it will cease to be an obstacle any longer.

For example, Mike, a good friend of mine, dreams of one day starting a minor league hockey team. I dare say that for most of us, this sounds like a *huge* mountain to get past, especially when Mike tells me that it will take up to \$2 million to get it off the ground, and he will have to find investors to make it happen.

Nevertheless, Mike remains undaunted by this "mountain." Consider why. He has a personal history of success in the game. He has also done his research and is *very* specific on what he wants, even to the point of defining every detail. For instance, he knows exactly where he wants his team located—West Palm Beach, Florida—and has even chosen the perfect arena. He has also put together a top notch Power Point presentation to attract investors. Mike has left nothing to chance and remains very positive and enthusiastic. There is no doubt in my mind that he will one day hurdle this mountain and achieve his dream.

If you are facing a mountain-like obstacle in achieving your goal, take heart! Learn what you need to know and move forward. Never let anything discourage you! Once I was discouraged about achieving my own professional goals, and told Mike that I felt like my objective "was a million miles away." After several months passed, and I was a little closer to my objective, Mike reminded me of my earlier comment when he said to me, "That million miles seems a lot closer now, doesn't it?" What an encouragement! Keep working toward your goal and never quit! Sometimes even when you feel like you are at a standstill, you are nonetheless moving. It was just an illusion. By finding the right path over the mountain, you'll find that what was once a huge mountain—an illusion—is now just a molehill. Now there are neither potholes in the road, nor mountains ahead—just smooth, level ground!

Doesn't this make sense? Things are only difficult because we haven't learned how to do them yet. Once we do, they become easy. Think positively, after all, how hard can it be? People just like you and me put men on the moon!

THE WORST KIND OF HOLE

The effects of being in a hole can even lead to another kind of hole—a hole in our spirit. There is a difference between being in a hole, and having a hole inside of us. If this hole within is not mended, the essence of who we are can drain out. It can be our power, our strength, our drive and motivation, our ambition, our sense of meaning, our self-identity, and/or our enjoyment of life. If our spirit drains completely, we may find ourselves beset with depression, or even worse, we can die inside. What a tragedy it is when a person has such a gaping hole in their soul that they want to die. An open hole in the spirit can, in turn, contribute greatly to getting into a hole in other areas of life. One hole leads to another, and thus the vicious cycle of holes begins.

Granted, many things bring happiness in the world. But by the same token, so many good people are so weighed down with the anxieties of life. Social illnesses, such as drug abuse and alcoholism don't just affect the abuser, they affect everyone around them, including an employer, or any unwitting victims in a drug or alcohol related auto accident. Additionally, victims of child sexual abuse can sustain such a vast hole inside, that they may find it difficult to ever mend the hole and heal completely.

You may have never experienced the devastation that can come from dealing with an alcoholic, or being victimized by a pedophile. Consider yourself fortunate. These atrocities can literally blow a person away. They are life changing events, and not in the positive sense. But with the right attitude and approach, positive benefits can come from tragic circumstances.

The foregoing are certainly not the only things that can throw you for a loop. Many things, such as abruptly losing a job, going through a divorce, or some other kind of life changing situation can also pull the rug out from under you, leaving a deep pit where the rug was and a hole in your spirit.

If you are hurting because you have an abysmal hole within, take heart too! Be encouraged by the fact that there are others out there who really know the depth of your pain! Seek them out. Talk to them about your pain, and learn of theirs.

Where do you find these people? Many groups exist to help with a number of different issues, such as grief and loss, codependency, alcoholism, dealing with an alcoholic, and victims of abuse. Please also consider seeking the help of a professional counselor or therapist, if necessary. There is no shame in getting the help that you need to heal. Sometimes when in a hole, *it is okay* to ask someone to throw you a rope. Why not ask?

If you have a hole in your spirit, the *most important* thing you can do is to mend the hole post-haste. Why? Because when a person is literally starving to death, the *most* important thing on that person's mind is NOT planting a garden—it is finding his or her next meal. **Your soul is starving—give it a meal!** *Nothing* is more important than mending the hole in your spirit! When you are not "whole" within, *nothing* else matters to you. Your job doesn't matter; what you own doesn't matter; your life doesn't matter. Do you see how serious this is? You simply cannot reach your full potential or find true enjoyment and meaning in life with a continual hole in your spirit.

With healing, the hole in your spirit closes. Your power, energy and essence are no longer leaking out. Now you can start to fill the void with the good stuff of life. And with a mended spirit, your outlook will change for the better. Your spirit will naturally begin to fill with more positive and optimistic feelings. Your disposition will improve and your countenance will radiate the glow of a spirit that is whole and complete.

THE FIRST RULE OF "WHOLES"

When you find yourself in an unexpected hole, remember to explore the "Why" question thoroughly. And keep asking "Why?" until you discover the core reason(s) for getting into a hole. Along with determining a pathway out of the hole, use the lessons learned to avoid similar holes in the future.

In my own in-the-hole experience mentioned at the outset, I was able to make some last minute sales as well as borrow some money to cover my payroll dilemma. But I didn't stop there. I intensely analyzed the reasons why I got into that hole in the first place, learned the lessons, and made changes in the way I managed my business. This helped to make my business successful to the point

that I was able to sell it a few years later for a lot more than it cost to start.

Additionally, if you have patched a hole in your spirit, do what you need to do to fill your spirit up and make yourself whole again. And remember the "First Rule of 'Wholes'... when you are Whole, you have no Holes!"

But as with everything else in life, there are choices. And it is tragic that some people never learn the lessons of life and so have one in-the-hole experience after another. For those people all I can say is if you're going to dig yourself into a hole, keep digging—you'll find blue sky eventually. And if you don't, then look at the bright side: you won't have to pay the grave diggers. Or will you?

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