



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Focus—on CAN

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Focus—we all know it is very important, and now that things are tough for many people, focus is even more critical. However, focus can also be very detrimental. Why? Because when times get tough, many people spend time on focusing on the wrong things—they focus on CAN'T instead of CAN. I don't want to downplay the difficult situations that many of our readers and organizations are currently facing. For some organizations revenue is down, and staff size has been reduced more than either workload or budget. Even with these realities, focusing on CAN brings results, and options.

Let's explore a topical situation and the differences between focusing on CAN vs. CAN'T:

Your organization has announced no raises, no bonuses and a hiring freeze. Your workload has remained the same.

If your focus is on CAN'T, this might be your reaction:

- We can't go on vacation now, and we are going to have a terrible summer.
- I can't get a good review because I am going to have trouble completing my work.
- Can't management see what a terrible situation they are leaving me in?

CAN'T and positive action are very difficult to manage together.

Now look at the same situation with a focus on CAN:

- We are going to change our vacations plans so we can save some money. Let's look at day trips, or your cousin always offered us his cabin in the mountains. I never realized how many great things there are to do around here.
- I can also start bringing a lunch to save some money toward our trip.
- Work is going to be interesting. This is a great opportunity for me to show management how effective I can be.
- I am going to make a list of some additional training I will need to be more effective. I wonder if we have some of those training resources in other groups so we can use them at no cost.
- This is going to be hard, but it will be a wonderful opportunity and will have a positive impact on my future.

The person who focuses on CAN'T is not moving forward, and in many ways is moving backward. That person is making a difficult situation worse. The person who takes a CAN attitude is taking action, is moving forward, and making the best of the situation. The situations are the same—but who do you think will have a better result?

You might not have the ability to choose the situation, but you always have the ability to choose your response. Choose CAN, and choose to make the best of any situation. ●