



But 'what if' Something Bad Happens!? How to Resolve Worrisome 'what if' Thoughts in 3 Steps, or Less!

In life, and in business, we can be really excited to do and try new things, and by pushing ourselves out of our comfort zone we learn, grow, and develop ourselves and our businesses. But sometimes we can be stopped in our tracks by the 'but what if...' thoughts that can accompany our daring new ventures and decisions. This is the brains way of trying to constantly protect us, however the brain doesn't differentiate between real and imagined threats to our safety.

Does this ever happen to you? You're excited (and maybe also a little nervous) about doing something new, or different, or out of your usual routine. Maybe you're:

- applying for a brilliant new job or promotion;
- offering your clients a brand new service
- moving from paid employment to self-employment

- thinking about moving somewhere new or to a place you've always wanted to live;
- going to a type of event you've never been to before;
- meeting new people either in a networking group or a social gathering;
- trying a new class in person or online;
- learning a new work related or personal skill or hobby;

and you're mostly really looking forward to the experience and the opportunities that it's going to bring you!

And then... you become aware of an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of your stomach, and a little voice whispers "but what if, by doing this, something **bad** happens!?"

(Or insert any other common what if thoughts here – what if no-one takes me seriously, what if they think I can't do it, what if I fail etc...) And then you might begin to think, "Oh no, I hadn't thought of that, maybe you're right, maybe this isn't for me, I don't want something bad to happen, that sounds awful!" And suddenly all your focus shifts to figuring out a way to get out of, postpone, or entirely put a stop to something you were initially excited and passionate about.

If any part of that thought exchange sounds familiar to you there are a few really easy steps you can take to more fully explore and dissolve those worrisome 'what if' thoughts, if they're not really serving you.

I would like to stress that exhibiting caution and weighing up all our options and the potential outcomes when making decisions, using all the information we have available to us at the time is a normal, healthy, sensible, highly useful exercise. What we need to be clear and careful about is whether all the information we are using to make a decision is real and accurate.

Step 1 – Before you do anything else acknowledge and thank your brain for **always** wanting to keep you safe, from both real and imagined threats. The brain

is so clever and creative that it does not differentiate between a real and an imagined threat. It just recognises (or thinks it recognises) threat. Often, an absence of information about what will happen in an unknown situation is coded as 'unsafe' by the brain. Once you've thanked your brain for doing a stellar job of keeping you safe, you can then proceed to ask it some simple friendly questions. As previously mentioned, our brains are **really** very creative – “something bad” is,

(a) incredibly big - it doesn't have any kind of boundary so there's enough space for it to be filled with all kinds of terrible possibilities (and therefore it feels scary and overwhelming.)

(b) it's incredibly **vague**. It could mean anything. It could include everything from, not so bad, to, absolutely catastrophic, and everything in between which can also feel frightening. That's why Step 2 is about getting really specific.

Step 2 – Ask your own brain this question “What very specific (bad) thing are you worried about happening?”

One of two things will happen. If you get a searching, uncertain type sensation or feeling in your body, you know the kind of embarrassed, squirming, searching movement someone makes when they either really don't know, or don't have a good answer to a question, and from this it's clear they haven't got anything to say. If that sensation is accompanied by a sound in your head that goes something along the lines of “Ummm something bad... Trust me, it'll be very very bad...! Really bad... So bad you just don't want to know...!” Already, the ‘what if’ has lost all of its credibility and is just starting to sound comical, and if we're honest, even a little bit desperate..! But it is no longer filled with the weight of any kind of truth and it's so obvious at this point that you just can't take the imagined danger seriously anymore. At this point you can safely and comfortably exit the 'what if' thought pattern with a “thanks for looking out for me brain, but I've got this one covered,” and you can get back to being excited about and preparing for whatever it is. You've already resolved the ‘what if’ without even having to move on to Step 3. Great work!

On the other hand, if you do get a clear, detailed, specific and concrete answer. Then you can move to the final step.

Step 3 - Ask for further evidence and make a plan. If there is a specific fear or worry that great, now you've narrowed it down from potentially everything, to just one (or maybe two) thing(s). So now you can ask for further evidence in the following way. "Has that specific thing ever happened to us in a similar situation before?" Again, one of two things will happen.

If the answer is "yes," and we've already experienced this before then we have learned a lot from what happened last time. So, we can **make a plan**.

What resources do we *already have* which will equip us to deal with a similar situation this time? What resources or strategies might we **need** for a different and better outcome this time?

If it hasn't ever happened before, the next important question is: "Is it actually likely to happen this time?" If the answer really is yes – great looking ahead brain – we can go to the same planning step as above – noticing what resources or strategies we already have (and anything extra we might need) in order to handle it successfully. And, as in the previous step, now that you have prepared a solution, you can take it with you as you get back to being enthusiastic about that original thing you were excited about and steel yourself for taking action. Safe and comforted (perhaps also nervously excited) now, knowing you have adequately prepared and equipped yourself.

On the other hand, if it's a "no," it hasn't ever happened, and objectively speaking, it's really not likely to happen at all, then, again, we can safely exit the 'what if' thought pattern, happy in the knowledge that our concerns are drastically reduced knowing how incredibly unlikely it is to happen. Here, notice the difference in how you feel now, compared to how you may have felt when you first had your initial overwhelming 'what if' thought(s).

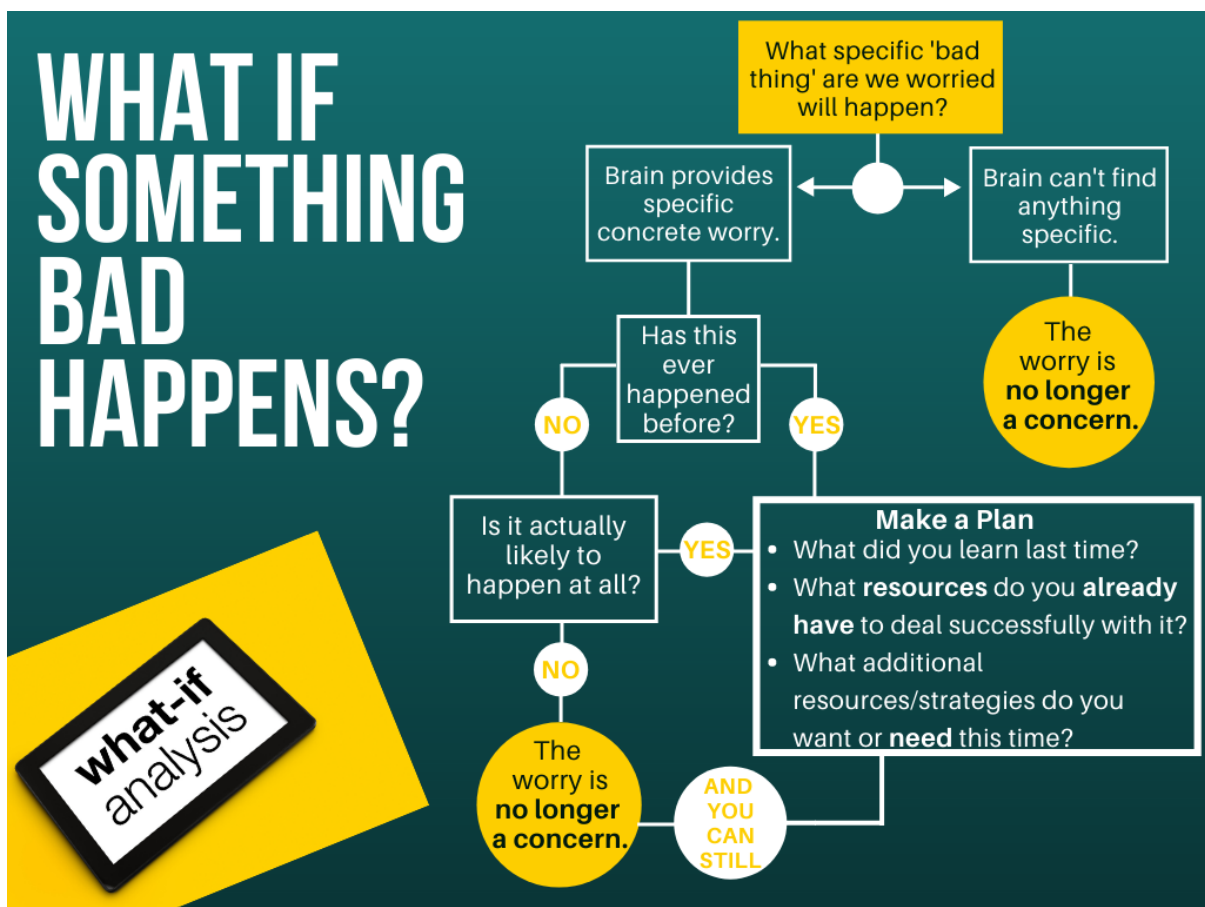
In addition, we can *still also make a plan*. In the very unlikely scenario that our specific worry were to happen, we can use that same creative brain power to think of creative solutions to successfully deal with it, taking into account the resources and strategies we already have and any additional needs. Now you can once again safely exit the 'what if' thought pattern, feeling even better now knowing (a) this thing is probably never going to happen anyway, and (b) even *if* it does we have already mentally prepared for that eventuality and now feel extra well equipped and ready to take gutsy action!

And there you have it. So, a quick recap on the steps:

Step 1: Acknowledge and thank your brain.

Step 2: Get specific

Step 3: Where needed, ask for further factual evidence and details and make a plan.



And remember, if your brain gets creative with the 'what ifs' then **you can get creative too!**