

Expect the Unexpected

In the early 1990s, the complex systems professor Scott Sagan said of unexpected events:

"Things that have never happened before happen all the time."

That has certainly felt true in the last decade. But why do some people react quickly in a crisis while others freeze and don't act?

In Amanda Ripley's book *Unthinkable*, she interviewed dozens of people who had survived crises from 9/11 to Hurricane Katrina and found a pattern of how people react. Ripley called this pattern the **Survival Arc**: Denial, Deliberation, Decisive Action:

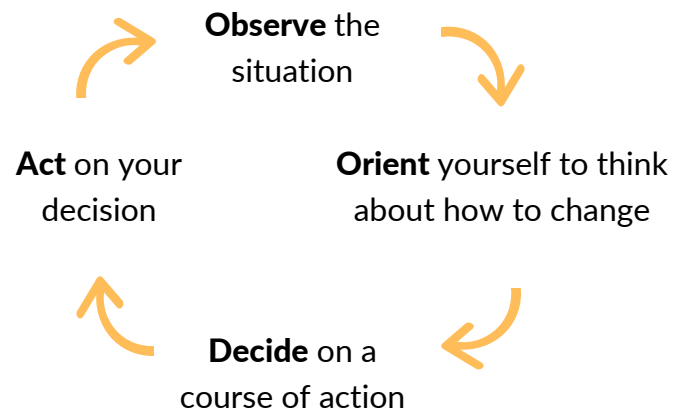
- 1 Denial:** People initially have denial about what's happening.
- 2 Deliberate:** Then they deliberate and consider what to do next.
- 3 Decisive Action:** Finally, they decide and act.

The difference between people is how quickly they go through this process. While some might take minutes or even longer to go through the deny, deliberate, decide cycle, others do it quickly and take decisive action. In a crisis, the speed of decision is often the difference in survival.

What do you do as a candidate when things that have never happened before happen?

While the Survival Arc helps us understand how people naturally respond to crises, we need a framework to move quickly from denial to decisive action. This is where the OODA loop comes in.

Fighter pilot and military strategist John Boyd developed the OODA loop to provide a structured approach to rapid decision-making to help in unexpected situations. **OODA stands for Observe, Orient, Decide, Act.**



The key is not to make your decision a one-time decision. As you start to act, you observe the results, reorient or adjust, and make new decisions as needed.

The Bottom Line

In these final weeks, remember that things that have never happened before happen all the time. But you have the tools to respond effectively. By understanding the Survival Arc and implementing the OODA loop, you can confidently navigate unexpected situations.



Expect the Unexpected in Your Campaign

In the final weeks of your campaign, expect the unexpected. If you:

Get a Tough Question?

Remember you can give two points or a story plus an insight. (See [Winning Edge #25](#)).

Misspeak in an Interview or Debate?

Pause, give yourself a second to collect your thoughts, and then immediately clean up the mess. (See [Winning Edge #9](#)).

Get Criticized by the Media for Something from the Past?

Use the 3 Rs to show regret, reason, and remedy. (See [Winning Edge #24](#)).

Have a Challenging Conversation with a Voter?

Use the "feel, felt, found" framework to respond with empathy. (See [Winning Edge #37](#)).

The key is to act quickly and decisively in the face of uncertainty. Observe, orient, decide, and then act. As you get more information, refine your decision. Don't be wedded to a single course of action.