

Be the Diamond

Change is inevitable. Growth is optional.” – John Maxwell

There are times in life, both personally and professionally, where circumstances can change at such a rapid speed that our opinions, perspectives, and course of action can change by the day, if not by the hour. When faced with such circumstances, there are generally three groups of people:

- Those who take reflective but action-oriented responses to do whatever can be done to mitigate the challenges and seize opportunities
- Those who simply panic and overload themselves and others with reactions that may be reasonable but tend to only exacerbate the challenges
- Those who are simply bystanders; the proverbial “deer in the headlights”

As leaders, we have an obligation to do all we can to put ourselves in the first group. When there is so much we cannot control, we *can* control being the loudest voice in the room.

How can we capitalize on chaos and emerge stronger, both as a leader and as an organization?

Embrace the Gray

With all that seems to divide the world today, it turns out that we might not be as far apart as it seems. The news feeds on extremes; no longer just a 30-minute daily segment or a newspaper on your doorstep. Rather, social media is the source of news for many. With that shift, it also means now that news is a commodity; media outlets fight for clicks and viewership. Headlines are now competing for your business, and extremes are great for business.

More than ever, it is essential to realize that most issues are not problems to be solved. Rather, they are polarities to be managed. There are usually no solutions that don't have additional problems *within* that solution. It is important to understand that continuum, evaluate both intended and unintended outcomes, and recognize that most everything is gray. Generally, individuals would declare that they want freedom to assemble, free speech, and the like. They also want safety. If we sacrifice all our freedoms, it is easy to establish order and security. If we don't sacrifice any freedoms, then security we crave is all but impossible. Thus, there is no perfect solution.

Seeing this as a polarity to manage versus a right/wrong approach shifts our paradigm and allows all to better understand each other's perspective. It is possible to hold two opposing views simultaneously in a world that needs optimization over perfection.

Imposter Syndrome

It's only natural, when faced with a new crisis, to harbor a dirty little secret – that deep down inside, you have no idea what you are doing. Many high achievers can at times, feel like complete frauds; your accomplishments are just the result of serendipitous luck. Although you've been told many times that one of the secrets to success is “fake it until you make it,” this can also lead to what many label as imposter syndrome – a feeling of inadequacy despite evidence that indicates you're skilled and quite successful.

Here's the good news: although you might be leading a team through uncharted waters and not sure of your footing, you are completely in control of where you choose to step. You are completely in control of your voice, your message to others, and your attitude. Recognize that perfectionism and imposter syndrome are often a related pair. Many high performing individuals set excessively high goals for themselves and tend to have a twinge of control-freak woven in; historically, if you want something done right, you have to do it yourself. In times of uncertainty, it may feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders – so distribute the weight. Find other leaders who are also leading through uncharted waters and learn from them. Create opportunities by delegating responsibilities, and don't expect immediate perfection from others. Remember that you are better than you think you are, smarter than you think you are, and more worthy than you believe.

Ultimately, imposter syndrome might not be something from which you suffer, but it may be for those you lead. Look for signs around you just as much as you look for signs within.

Your Choice

Protect your mind. In times of unknown, whether it be an acquisition, new leadership, economic uncertainty, or global turmoil, people tend to experience greater anxiety when they feel like they don't have access to the information that they need. On the other hand, a sense of panic can stem from being immersed 24/7 in reports that focus on inaccurate or overly negative information. “*Why is this happening*” is a question of despair; “*what can we do*” is a question of possibilities and hope.

The quest for certainty is a quest for comfort. Ultimately, it might be that the support we seek comes from a *who* rather than a *what*. **People** in our lives are what truly shape us. When times are good, our families, friends, work associates, clients...they know us, but in times of adversity, we truly know them. Choose to be the kind of person you would want in your life when you face personal adversity. Choose empathy over judgment. Choose optimism over pessimism. Choose to give over taking. Choose to be the person that makes others feel better after they interact with you. Choose to be with people who make you a better you.

Most spend as much time with work associates as they do with even the closest family or friends. What if all of us made a concerted effort to be the best version of ourselves with each other? What if we all treated each other the way that s/he wants to be treated? What if the *who* we are collectively provides much of the comfort we all seek? What if we then did our best to take this way of being to our family, friends, and community?

Times of adversity shape who you will become, but also expose who you are now. Diamonds are just chunks of coal that did well under pressure. In times of chaos, be the diamond.

Finding People Who Make a Difference®

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—Jacob Darr