



LEADING

Top challenges facing those who lead the team and how to deal with them.

BY CHRIS CRUGER



One thing nobody impressed upon you when you were chosen for a position of leadership is the importance of simply showing up – to be there to handle situations with integrity, confidence and a balanced head; to be the guiding light; to be present; to be there when you're needed, whenever that might be.

Another thing no one told you was that you are supposed to have all the answers. Actually, that's not true, but it isn't far off. As the profession moves into this

"If there is no struggle, there is no progress"

– Frederick Douglass

post-pandemic era, there is greater need for quality leaders today than ever before, which also means there is tremendous opportunity for young professionals today. Whether that journey leads to

working for someone else or for yourself, success will likely require you to handle a great many adversities.

As a leader, you must remain balanced in the face of change and adversity. You either need to see the change coming or make sure you are prepared to handle it on the fly; one way or another, it's coming, and I am a big believer in being prepared. You will inevitably handle one or two of these changes on the fly, but the more you can be prepared for them, the better, particularly as a young leader.

We are going to touch on a number of challenges here, and readers should note a common thread in dealing with all of them. That common thread is the leader. It's you and how you handle/react to the situations you encounter. It is how you react in that critical moment that sets the tone. Whether we are dealing one-on-one or in public, the perception we create becomes the reality, and it's the leader who sets the reality for the organization and the communities it serves.

Some challenges will be larger than others, but a leader must remain calm, focused and compassionate in all situations.

COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

Communication is probably the number-one stressor for a leader. Inevitably, you are going to face challenges in which people are going to make mistakes, miss a deadline or simply be confused. Hone your skills at being clear, concise and to the point. Set the tone for the organization.

BEING LIKED, BEING RESPECTED

As a leader, you aren't always going to be liked. When you take a leadership position, you immediately become the target of all manner of attention – some good and some not so good. Don't let this alter your shot. Work to always be kind and focused in your communication. Respect will come with doing the right things, but do not allow it to consume you.

HANDLING PRESSURE

Life in general has a lot of pressure these days. The work environment has even more when you're the leader. Your ability to handle that pressure is important. Your ability to accept and release that pressure is even more so. You can't run at full speed all the time. As I tend to go full tilt quite often, my balance is through exercise. It works for me.

MAINTAINING FOCUS

Remember what I said about all that attention. It's easy to get distracted. Everybody wants something, is trying to sell you something or simply wants you to notice them. You become a beacon for attention, not all of it wanted. It can become debilitating. Your job is to not get distracted and to remain focused on your endgame. Make your plan and keep focused. Be the very best at what you do and don't be a victim of the shiny new toy syndrome.

STAYING MOTIVATED

I've always believed you can feel energy within an organization. Sometimes, it's warmth or excitement coursing through. Other times, you can feel motivation or enthusiasm fall completely flat. Sometimes you can simply feel the air leave the room.

It happens to the very best of us, but we have to muster the energy to get back on track. Don't spend your time worrying about what isn't working unless you're able to fix it. You are the number-one cheerleader for your team, and even when you're off your game, your team still looks to you as the number-one cheerleader. As a leader, you set the tone.

CULTURAL ISSUES

If you work in an organization, you have cultural issues, whether they're big or small. When multiple people are involved, there are going to be issues with culture, and they will have to be addressed. There will be people who don't get along, communication issues, gossip and all sorts of the most childish things you can imagine. I am often amazed at the problems grown adults can cause – but only until the next time. Changing the tone of an organization isn't easy, but the leader sets the tone. If you don't want people to gossip, don't gossip. If you want things done a certain way, show them. You are setting the tone for the organization, and the culture will reflect you.

DRAMA

There will be difficult people on your team, in the organization and in your professional life. Heck, it could be your local coroner. The trick is to not get caught up in the drama. Remain objective and handle each situation with grace and kindness. Don't feed

into the drama and certainly don't become it! Don't prolong your exposure. You need to be clear, concise and part of the solution.

FIRING SOMEONE

At some point in your career, you'll likely be required to ask somebody to leave your organization. There are many ways to do this, and the circumstances dictate the approach. But never do this in a rash manner or while you're angry or emotional. Be sure to make a balanced and prepared decision. Your ability to calmly make organizational change for the better of the organization is what defines true leadership.

DELIVERING BAD NEWS

Problems will occur, people will be disappointed and things won't always work out the way you want them to. It's a leader's job to deliver that bad news. The good news? It's okay. Being able to deliver bad news without drama and with clarity will allow everybody to find their footing. Bad things happen – it's how and when you share that information that's

important. Sometimes delaying the news or a poor delivery can be worse than the news itself. Delivering bad news well is a very powerful skill.

FAILURE

Every once in a while, you are going to have a project, a funeral service or something that is a total bust. Despite your best efforts, things simply fall flat. Anyone who tells you they haven't experienced a bust like that is a liar. Don't worry about it. Once again, it happens to the best of us. How you handle the situation is what matters. Shake it off and figure out what's next. Don't allow yourself or your team to get lost in a spiral of self-pity. Do a quick assessment of what went wrong and move on. Pulling yourself together quickly is key. Nobody wants to see their leader sulking.

JUST SHOW UP

So much of success is simply being present, handling problems head-on and acting with integrity and professionalism. You won't always have all the answers, but being present with a level head will make you a

better leader than most. We live in a world in which it is far too easy to text, email or call and far too easy to avoid or ignore. By simply showing up and being present in your organization, you are off to a good start. ☸

Chris Cruger is CEO of The Foresight Companies, a Phoenix-based business and management consulting firm for the funeral and cemetery professions. He is seen as an innovator and thought leader in the profession, his great success based on his exceptional ability to provide comprehensive solutions to intricate business challenges faced by leaders in our industry. Reach Cruger at 800-426-0165 or chriscruger@theforesightcompanies.com. Connect with Cruger and The Foresight Companies on Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. Additional educational information is offered at theforesightcompanies.com/blog/category/articles.

Madelyn CO.

The opportunity to choose a Keepsake Pendant presents itself only once. The comfort a Keepsake Pendant offers, lasts a lifetime.

Known for quality materials and craftsmanship, Madelyn Co. Keepsake Pendants are hand-made using jewelry-grade metals.

CALL ABOUT OUR MONTHLY SPECIALS OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE

800-788-0807 Fax 608-752-3683 www.madelynpendants.com e-mail orders@madelyncoco.com