

7 TIPS FOR TURBULENT TIMES: MANAGING UNDER PRESSURE



You and I live in turbulent times. Webster's New World Dictionary defines turbulence as commotion, violent agitation, irregular motion, wild disorder. Such words accurately summarize our world in 2008. For many of us, every day brings feelings of the earth moving beneath our feet. Where is the stability, the security, and the peace we crave?

It doesn't exist in the ways we think it should. It just doesn't. And it may not exist in those ways ever again. What does this mean? It means we have to look elsewhere for what we desperately want and say we need.

As an executive, you've got to "get it together" for your own sake and the sake of your organization. You are a leader. How you think, what you feel, and what you do affects everyone around you. You can allow yourself to be sucked into the swirling waters with no survival plan, or you can integrate the following seven tips into your life NOW:

① Find your center to become grounded.

One of the scariest periods I ever experienced in my work life was the time when my organization was at great risk for losing a significant percentage of its government funding. In truth, I quaked in my shoes. So much was at stake, and my staff looked to me for the reassurance I couldn't give. The situation seemed grim. The only thing that helped me navigate that year was complete trust in my ability to cope.

No matter what has been thrown my way over thirty years, I have relied on my self-knowledge of my steadfastness, my belief in a Higher Power, and my commitment to weathering the storm de jour. I've learned to flow more with turbulence, finally understanding that severe resistance only aggravates the situation for myself and others in my charge.

I urge you to identify your rock, and then to hold onto it regardless of global, national, or local circumstances. Take action based upon that rock. Avoid being pulled in a hundred different directions. Listen to your inner voice; it quiets the mind.

② Stay the course.

Your company's mission statement and strategic plan are the course. Remind yourself daily of your organization's purpose, its primary reason for existence. Frequent re-writing of missions and plans is rarely a good thing. As fast as the world changes, you could conceivably re-do these documents multiple times a year. That makes no sense for a number of practical and philosophic reasons. What does make sense is being clear about company priorities and triaging goals and objectives when necessary. Maybe you can't accomplish the fifty things originally outlined. Maybe fulfilling half of them is your reality right now. Knowing which half can mean the difference between surprising success and devastating loss.

③ Trust your instincts.

Everyone is intuitive. Yes, everyone. Those who appear to be more intuitive than others simply tune into it more often and more deeply. You have to practice using your intuition, and eventually you will come to rely on it. You won't make decisions without consulting it. Believe me; it's true.

Instincts are visceral, not intellectual. To make wise decisions you need to check in with both your mind and your guts. Something can seem right in your head but not in your stomach. Pay attention to what you feel there. Go with it. Ninety percent of the time or more you'll be on target.

There are times when, though following the course, you know you need to alter the strategies for completing a certain objective. Your instincts tell you events or circumstances demand it. Failing to make these necessary shifts in how you accomplish something can bring great loss to your company. Loss of profits, loss of employee morale, loss of reputation... Always review and weigh the external factors, and let them guide you as you move forward on your course.

④ Keep employees focused.

Turbulence, particularly ongoing turbulence, upsets most people, knocking them off balance. Perhaps the best way to help employees swim the rapids is to clarify for them what is truly important during the chaos. Folks may not be sure of much, but, if they are sure about company priorities, they can buckle down and focus. Turbulent times actually provide an opportunity for staff to engage in magnificent team work.

During that terrible year of uncertain funding in my own organization, I made it a point to discuss priorities during every team meeting as well as

individual staff meeting. As a result, I found that my staff dealt with their anxiety more productively. Having a clear path to follow, they felt more secure. When they felt more secure, the quality of their work improved. People tend not to do well during extended periods of time burdened by fear that has no constructive outlet.

⑤ Manage your fear.

The best way you can take control of your fear is to seek support from and through other people, spiritual resources, physical exercise, and spiritual practices. Pretending you are not afraid or stuffing your fear deep inside breeds physical and/or emotional illness. You really do have to deal with it, or it eats you alive.

Further, if you become a half-person, you cannot possibly lead your team effectively. A diminished, weakened, compromised individual exacerbates the fear already monopolizing the environment. You need to tap into whatever strength you have and then build on it. Develop it. Grow it. Talk to people you trust. Hire a coach. Take long walks. Meditate. Read motivational literature. Attend worship services. Pray. Start a new hobby that requires concentration. Whatever you do, avoid wallowing in the fear. Know that destructive mind chatter allowed to run wild robs you of the energy and creativity you must possess in bundles under the circumstances.

⑥ Acknowledge that every situation changes with time.

While many of us don't want life to change, it's a good thing that it does. Even the bad stuff changes. Nothing stays the same. Sometimes the changes are dramatic; sometimes they are minor shifts. Regardless of the magnitude of the change, different dynamics get set into motion. A new vice president joins the executive team... a key employee unexpectedly dies... our Board fails to reach the consensus everyone else hoped for... the company budget is seriously sliced... the United States economy crashes... Each of these situations alters how business gets done in your shop. Any one of these can happen overnight.

When they happen, we have three basic choices: to act constructively, to act destructively, or to go numb and freeze. What do YOU do? What's been YOUR history? Do you need to choose a healthier way of coping with change and guiding others through the change they fear?

⑦ Open up to possibilities.

Though frightening, turbulent times often show us opportunities we never dreamed of before. We are more creative and vibrant during chaos than during stability. Turbulence jumpstarts the cerebral juices, allowing us to birth fresh ideas and to examine the same old story from a very different angle. In that sense turbulent times are indeed a gift. A gift we shy away from perhaps, but nonetheless a true gift.

Consider this: if human beings would live within the blissful bubble of security indefinitely, we would have no reason to explore our glorious potential. We are not meant to stagnate. We are here to be stretched and, yes, occasionally to be zapped out of our comfort zones. It is in the turbulent times when we find out exactly who we are and of just how much we are capable. Turbulent times force us to stand taller in the game called life.

Are YOU more paralyzed by fear or excited by possibility? Which is the real YOU? And what message are YOU sending YOUR team? Take a deep breath and think about it.

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Launching Lives

get unstuck...create a new story