

I learned from a blog post by Chris Patton that years ago, Andy Stanley wrote three questions on a 3x5 card that he has carried with him and refers to often. The three questions are:

- what are we doing?
- why are we doing it?
- where do I fit in?

Those are great questions for the leader personally. These are also appropriate for the leader to consider for everyone in his or her organization.

The blog post, as of today, can be found here:

<http://christianfaithatwork.com/clarity-from-3-questions-part-2/>

The wisdom contained in the blog post is a terrific supplement to the article below.

Dennis Hooper, January 2, 2020

Paradox and Ambiguity vs. Clarity

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2003, published June 17, 2003 in the *Houston Home Journal*

The financial news reporter last week told of a recent poll of financial advisors. Among these stock market experts, 58% were bullish, 16% were bearish, while the rest would not offer an opinion. The conclusion of this poll--the markets are probably headed down!

What? Down? How can that be?

For those not familiar with these terms, "bullish" means "we think the stock market is headed up," and "bearish" means "we think the stock market is headed down". Can it really be, after a three-year bear market, when so many financial advisors are optimistic that the market is headed up, that we should expect some further retrenchment?

Apparently so--history has shown that this is the paradoxical conclusion!

"Paradox" was the topic I discussed last week (if you missed that column, contact me and I'll send you a copy). Let's examine the leader's role under paradoxical, ambiguous, and uncertain conditions.

In today's world of rapid change, few organizations have the luxury of "certainty" in their operations, products and services, and customers. "Uncertainty is not an indication of poor leadership; it underscores the need for leadership." So says Andy Stanley in his 2003 book *The Next Generation Leader*.

So much of leadership involves dealing with situations where the "right" choice is not obvious. Still, individuals need explicit direction in order to function together, and providing that clarity during times of uncertainty is the role of the leader.

There is already plenty of ambiguity in the environment--leaders should not add to it! If their direction is not clear and consistent, followers lose commitment and loyalty to the cause.

A woman called me about a report that her company just started generating. Last week she was given a written warning about the poor quality of results on the April report. Yet in April, no one knew this report was going to be generated. No one knew that the content of this report was included among, as she described it with a wink, "the ten #1 priorities we have to manage."

This woman is being held accountable today for expectations not made clear to her two months ago. After five years of faithful and diligent service to her employer, her devotion and loyalty are diminished solely because the leaders of this organization have not been clear with their expectations. Rather than supporting the people who are doing the work, they are adding unrealistic demands to an already pressurized work environment.

The world in which you are operating is already packed with ambiguity and paradox. Change is hurtling at us at breakneck speed. As a leader, you are not expected to predict the future or eliminate all the ambiguity and paradox. However, with the information you have, your followers expect you to choose a strategy, identify a direction for them, and lay out clear expectations.

Andy Stanley advises, "That kind of clarity requires confidence and humility. Confidence to move boldly in the direction you have determined. Humility to acknowledge that at best you are making an educated guess."

If the direction and plan changes based on new information, the leader should share the new information with the organization, accept the responsibility for the change in direction, then describe the new expectations that exist from this time forward. Leaders should not hold others accountable for expectations previously unspecified. No one can go back and influence last month's results with actions taken today.

Many people think "leadership" is easy and fun. However, the more responsibility you assume, the more uncertainty you will be expected to manage. Uncertainty is not the enemy but is the opportunity. The leader's responsibility is to bring clarity in the midst of paradox and ambiguity.

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