

## **Serving Through Times of Trouble**

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Clip this article and pass it along to an individual who's engaged in a season of struggle and wondering if it will ever end. Or save the article for some time when your life is filled with turbulence.

If there is a reader out there somewhere who has never been bombarded with difficulties from all directions, please contact me and share your secret. I'll pass along your advice to all my readers, and we'll all be eternally grateful.

Of course, there is no "silver bullet" to eliminate these occasional periods from our lives. Sometimes, it just seems that life is a maelstrom of unpredictability, and we struggle to handle our various roles and responsibilities.

First, I hope that these times are relatively rare for you. Many of us are able to keep the frequency and duration of such periods small by having a clear vision for our lives and moving intentionally in the direction of making "what could be" actually come to pass. The power of our movement toward our destination makes the distracting waves of resistance ineffective in pushing us off course.

If you read biographies of individuals you admire as "having it all together," you'll learn that they look back on turbulent times as a turning point, or at least a time of tremendous growth. Some recall that troubled times were the source of an increase in dexterity, expanded capacity to innovate, or stability in their spiritual faith.

You won't read much on leadership development blogs about faith. Many leadership consultants don't even acknowledge a spiritual dimension in a leader's life. Yet faith is God's gift to us for overcoming fear and distress. The need for a strong spiritual foundation is evident the more I am challenged by requests for help from leaders who face overwhelming demands.

As you might imagine, I influence leaders of every religious perspective. As a Christian coach, I am routinely torn between sharing what I believe and conducting myself within the context of the client's world (including his or her religious practices and beliefs). I've chosen to adopt the counsel of St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words."

My desire is that clients will observe my commitment to serving them and will be influenced to do the same with both their employees and their customers. After all, the concept of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is contained within the principles of every major religion in the world.

In times of trouble, whatever level of spiritual faith you have, call upon it! Engage those who know and love you to pray with you. In turbulent times, we acknowledge that we are not in control, and we seek to strengthen our relationship with a more powerful source of wisdom.

Why would I address this topic in a column that focuses on counsel for leaders who desire moving their organization toward excellence? Two reasons. One is to provide support to you. You may not need encouragement today, but you'll experience a time of trouble at some point.

Perhaps the bigger reason is so that you can provide support and counsel to those you influence. You see, individuals with whom you engage will also struggle occasionally. Leaders may forget that all those other people--employees, suppliers, customers, family members, and neighbors--sometimes experience periods of turbulence in their lives. As a leader, you will often find yourself in a position where you can at least offer compassion.

Perhaps you can offer more: a temporary relaxation of the rules, time off, an employee assistance program, access to a counselor or coach, or a short-term interest-free loan. Clearly, this cannot become repetitive for the same employee. Instead, he or she may have to make massive lifestyle changes to correct a chronic problem.

Beware the temptation to adopt the problems of the individual as your own. You can't fulfill the role of "helper" if you remove control of the situation from the hands of the individual. Your biggest contribution may be helping the person to be creative in generating options, to reach out to other resources, or to establish a better sense of balance in life.

I started this week's article with a recommendation that you save this article for future reference. Let me close with that same suggestion. I predict that sometime in the next couple of months, you or someone you know will need the encouragement available here.