

## Leadership instalments

### LEADING THROUGH TURMOIL

By Dan Gaynor

**AS I WRITE, STOCK MARKETS ARE UP ONE DAY AND** down another and it seems every major media outlet is forecasting recession. Fear and trepidation has seeped out into organizations around the world. Leaders everywhere are facing the challenge of leading through turmoil. Whether you lead five or 5,000 people, these will be defining days.

As a newspaper executive I led several different teams through periods of change and turmoil. I learned that when you guide a team through these periods successfully they emerge stronger and more confident. So what steps should you take?

1. Recognize the enemy:

I have often commented that much of a leader's role is to create focus and release energy. Yet so many leaders unwittingly do just the opposite – and even more so at times like this – they create distractions and diminish energy. In times of turmoil your enemy is fear and fear always creates a distraction. So you must take steps to attack fear and build confidence.

2. Appreciate the power of your example:

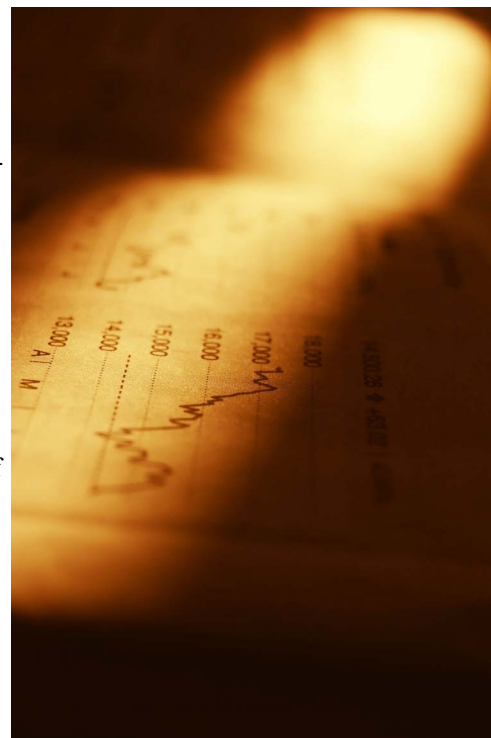
The first thing you should do is look in the mirror and consider the example you are setting. Very few leaders appreciate how closely they are watched. And everything you do and say is watched more closely in times of uncertainty. If you appear fearful, pessimistic or uncertain your team will falter. Rather than focusing on the work that needs to be done, they'll be distracted by fear and worry. They may even give up just when you need them digging in and working harder. So be careful with what you say and do. Speak and act confidently. They need your strength.

3. Lead with a firm grip:

In times of turmoil, teams look to their leaders for the way through the storm. As much as people appreciate some autonomy most times, right now they want you to know what to do, so tighten controls and take command. Develop a battle plan and make some assignments. This will build confidence and have the added value of giving them something constructive to focus on. It's so much easier for people to get through a tough time when they don't feel powerless so give them a piece of the plan to work on.

4. Communicate far more often:

When people are worried their need to be "in the know" goes up substantially, so communication becomes far more important. If you normally hold a staff meeting once every three months, start holding one every month. You'll do well as things heat up to hold a brief meeting every week or two. Talk about the situation realistically and confidently. Talk about the steps you are taking and help everyone see that their part of the plan is important. Every time you get them together you have another opportunity to build confidence and keep them focused, and you'll be sending an important signal that you care about them.



Times of turmoil are a two-bladed sword; they can be periods of accelerated team growth or decline. When a leader fails during times like these teams lose confidence that can be very hard to rebuild, but when you lead skilfully and with confidence these same circumstances turn out to be periods of accelerated team development. Coming through a tough time like we're facing can build new skills and confidence when we get leadership right.

Dan Gaynor

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. **What is the example you and other leaders around you are setting?**
2. **Do you have a clear plan of action and have you shared it with your team?**
3. **How often are you holding staff meetings and what is the best time and location to hold them going forward?**

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