

Leadership  
in  
Times of Anxiety

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness. It was the season of light, it was the season of darkness. It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

Charles Dickens,  
*A Tale of Two Cities*



UPROAR

We have created a Star Wars civilization, with Stone Age emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology. We thrash about.

E. O. Wilson, naturalist

The blizzard of the world has overturned the order of the soul.

Leonard Cohen

A generation that's going to be asked to dance in a hurricane.

*Kirkus Review*

# Fear and Anxiety

- Both are stressors
- Fight
- Flight
- Freeze
- Tend
- Befriend



# Fear





# Anxiety

Start worrying!

Details to follow.



# Our Lizard Brain







# Effects of Anxiety

- Creates “imaginative gridlock,” limiting what we can see, hear or understand
- Decreases our capacity to learn
- Forecloses the realm of options, alternatives and possibilities
- Increases our demand for certainty and arouses feelings in inadequacy
- Focuses our attention away from self to external factors

# More Negative Effects

- Magnifies differences
- Migrates and perpetuates itself like an infection
- Unleashes blaming of others
- Postpones patience and leads to foolish decisions
- Prepares us to sell our souls to a miraculous cure or larger-than-life figure
- Leads to an array of defensive behaviors



# Defensive Measures

- Denial
- Oversimplification
- Ignoring
- Indecisiveness
- Scapegoating



# Anxiety Triggers

- Disruptions
- Feeling trapped
- Threat (real or imagined)
- Differences
- Uncertainty
- Depletion

# Why are we here?

No group shapes and influences a congregation's health, efficiency, and growth more than church leaders and...

The leaders' *being* and *functioning* are twin to each other.



- Anxiety alone will not harm or endanger a system.
- How anxiety is addressed will determine outcome more than anything.
- Your responsible and enlightened behavior will influence the situation more than any other action.

# Effective Leaders

- Have the courage to act on convictions in the midst of crisis or challenge
- Are interested in promoting the welfare of all alongside of leader's wellbeing
- Refrains from telling others what they should do and focuses on regulating self
- Respects the opinions of others but knows the difference between responsible and irresponsible thinking and acting

# Effective Leaders

- As leaders, are neither angry nor dogmatic
- Function with well-established beliefs or principles
- Utilize the strengths of others and is not depleted or resentful
- In summary, are the “non-anxious presence”

Murray Bowen





# How does that happen?

Differentiation is the relative ability of people to guide their own functioning by:

- Thinking clearly
- Acting on principle
- Defining self by taking a position
- Coming to know more about their own instinctive reactions to others
- Learning to regulate those reactions
- Staying in contact with others
- Choosing a responsible course of actions



# And how does that happen?

Knowing your limits and the limits of others

- A clear understanding of where “I” end and someone else begins
- A respect for the rights of others to be the way they are, yet refusing to allow others to violate or intrude upon your own right
- A readiness to define who you are from within, rather than adapting to please others or defining yourself over against others



# And....

Having a clarity about what you believe

- Having a set of convictions, values and beliefs
- Knowing what you would “die for” and what’s important
- Recognizing about what you are certain and about what you are not certain

# And....

## Taking stands with courage

- Defining where you stand and what you believe in the face of disapproval
- Refusing to give in for the sake of harmony when it is a matter of principle
- Standing firm in the face of strong reactions

# And...

## Staying on course

- Resolving to follow through, in spite of reactive opposition or sabotage
- Exercising emotional and spiritual stamina to follow a vision, not allowing reactive forces to change your course

# And even...

Staying connected to others, in the midst of it all

- Maintaining a nonreactive presence with people who are reacting to you (by verbally attacking you, avoiding your presence, minimizing your viewpoint)
- Resisting your own impulse to attack or cut off from those reacting to you, or to appease them, or to dispel their anger or frustration
- Managing your own anxiety, not others' anxiety



O God: Give me strength to live another day. Let me not turn coward before its difficulties or prove recreant to its duties; Let me not lose faith in other people; Keep me sweet and sound of heart, in spite of ingratitude, treachery or meanness; Preserve me from minding little stings or giving them; Help me to keep my heart clean, and to live so honestly and fearlessly that no outward failure can dishearten me or take away the joy of conscious integrity; Open wide the eyes of my soul that I may see good in all things; Grant me this day some new vision of thy truth; Inspire me with the spirit of joy and gladness, and make me the cup of strength to suffering souls; in the name of the strong Deliverer, our only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

--Phillips Brooks

# Bibliography

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