

November 07

# GUTS & GRACE

Notes on leadership from Michael T. Neiss and Associates



The guts to leap and the grace to fly!

## LEADING IN CHALLENGING TIMES

### Leadership when the brown stuff hits the rotary device.....

A foundational principle we discuss in the Leadership Challenge workshop is the importance of clarifying personal values and making sure there is alignment between actions and shared values. Our words and deeds during challenging times send powerful messages about our core values. These become teachable moments that shape the behavior of those we lead. We model the way by the example we set during tough times.

We are often aspirational when we define our values. It is who we intend to be. During good times, it is much easier to live up to those aspirations. When risk, uncertainty, and challenge rise, we often revert to instinctual behaviors that have we have learned that keeps us safe. These can be in conflict with our stated aspirational values.

The leadership challenge tests a leader's credibility. When we share our values with others, it is an implied promise to behave consistent with them. Certainly no one expects

perfect alignment; leaders are human afterall. However, the leader needs to be especially mindful of perceived inconsistencies. Here are some tips:

**Know yourself.** When faced with a difficult situation, what is your natural inclination? Is it consistent with your aspirations?

**Act with purpose, don't react on impulse.** The old adage of counting to ten can be very helpful here. Remember, leadership is a choice. So are our behaviors.

**Ask for help.** If you know you have certain triggers that evoke reactions counter to your desired values, enlist trusted teammates to throw the red flag before you slip into your blind-spot.

It takes guts to face difficult issues in a principled fashion. We sometimes slip into old behaviors. New approaches take time and practice to become habit. Learn from it, and forgive yourself...that's where grace comes in.



**The greater the challenge the more we need the support of others, and the more we need to support others!**

“Adversity doesn't build character, it reveals it.”

Pete Carril

# A CHALLENGE, NOT A CAKEWALK

In the previous article we focused on credibility and modeling the way in difficult times. The other four practices can help to engage the talents of the entire team in overcoming any challenge that comes their way.

## That vision thing...

Napoleon once noted, "Leaders are dealers in hope." The path to the ennobling possibility in the future is often fraught with challenge. There are always struggles involved pursuing things that matter. Martin Luther King gave us a dream of our possible future, if we were willing to pay the price. He said that in the pursuit of the dream, we may need to go to jail together.

This is a good time to dust off your vision and do a check up. Does it present a compelling image of the future? Does it touch the passions of the entire team? Will they be willing to struggle for that shared aspiration? Followers don't demand leaders make "it" better; they just want to know their struggles matter. Use your vision to create some positive momentum.

## Challenge and innovation...

In today's competitive environment we are all being asked to produce more with less. Eliminating waste and "slimming down" gives us an advantage in the marketplace. Continuous improvement is an important tool. Organizations that thrive in tough markets go beyond continuous improvement. They recognize what Dr. Deming preached, "It's all about the system."

If we can look at the waste in our organizations as a symptom, we have the opportunity to find the cure at the root level, not just treat that symptom. Leaders ask how we might do things differently, not just better. It may seem a contradiction, but when the pressure to tighten up is strong, it could be the time to loosen up and look for innovative solutions. Not just best practice, but next practice.

## Enable...give me the ball coach!

The vast majority of the leaders I work with share a common belief they are surrounded by great talent. Research going back some forty years suggests that this talent has huge deposits of discretionary effort available. This gap between what they have to do compared to what they could do if they chose to can be closed by effective leadership. When we enable, rather than merely empower, we are telling the team we trust their talent. We revel in it. We want them to use it at their A game level.

Many leaders feel the pressure to come up with answers during tough times. We suggest acknowledging we don't always know may be a key. Before you offer your solution, lay out the problem to your team and ask for their ideas.

Challenging times can create apprehension on your team. This is the time to share as much business information as you are able to. Teach



Leadership is the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations

your team how they can create more value for the organization.

Inspire, then enable.

## Encourage the heart...often!

And of course, recognizing contributions and celebrating our victories will provide the fuel for sustained performance! Find someone to thank....right now! We certainly thank you.

Anita Roddick

10/23/42 - 9/10/07

Founded The Body Shop in 1976

"If you think you are too small to make a difference, you have never been in bed with a mosquito."

Anita Roddick

## Why guts and grace?

I have discovered in 25 years of working in the field of leadership development that not all will answer the call to leadership. It takes courage, exceptional courage, it takes guts! And the leaders I have most admired shared a common trait...they live their lives with humility, compassion..Grace.

## Our passion:

- Leadership development
- Employer branding
- Optimizing our client's performance

## The Leadership Challenge

Michael T Neiss and Associates facilitators are Master Facilitators of TLC. This distinction is granted by the authors to those who have demonstrated extraordinary competence building leaders.

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