

7 Leadership Actions When Things Go Wrong

We love to lead when the sun is shining and the wind is at our back, but life and leadership doesn't always go that way.

In fact, most experienced leaders will say that's never reality. Things may be going well, you may even have good momentum, but there will always be obstacles to face. That's part of leadership.

However, there are times when what you're facing is more than everyday obstacles to overcome and problems to solve. It seems more like a storm at high seas.

There are times when your difficult circumstances create personal doubt and discouragement, but *there is a way* to lead through the storm.

This may seem like an unusual thing to say, but you can find some solace in knowing you're not alone. These conditions have been navigated by many before you.

Here are just a few things I've heard recently from different church leaders.

- Our church just got sued.
- Our board chairman just became seriously – possibly terminally ill.
- Our offerings have been under budget now for six months in a row.
- Our student ministry just experienced a 13-year-old break his arm at the youth meeting.
- Our worship pastor just announced his resignation without any warning.
- Our new property planned for relocation has an easement that kills the deal.
- Our young church plant just lost the school we were meeting in.
- Our church has lost 20% of its attendance in one year.

Any one of these can drain you of enthusiasm and energy, but two or three at one time and it's all you can do to hold on.

Leading in tough times when things are going wrong is difficult to say the least.

But it's in the tough times that you grow more and see the hand of God at work.

7 proven basics to help you lead well when things go wrong:

1) Don't panic.

Sometimes the situation is a surprise and you find yourself blindsided, and other times you could see it coming. But in either way, panic is not the solution. Granted it is easy to panic.

Panic comes from being overwhelmed and not knowing the way out. Panic is a result feeling trapped with no solutions, like being caught in a building that's on fire. **But if you panic, you**

perish. That's true for you as a leader too.

Step back, get quiet, think and pray. Whether you have only a couple hours or a couple days, take some time. Insist on it no matter how big the pressure or how loud the demands.

Collect your thoughts, regain your peace, and write a few sentences that summarize the problem(s) clearly and succinctly. The outcome will be far better.

2) Own what's yours to own.

The natural instinct is to source the problem, find blame, or place the responsibility somewhere else. The reason that's natural is because the human system seeks ways to lower pressure.

There are good ways to lower pressure, like in the previous point I mentioned think and pray. And there are poor ways, like try to pass the hot potato to someone else, make excuses or fix blame.

Own what is yours personally to own and take responsibility for the whole situation. This will not only help you grow as a leader but will increase the people's trust in you and respect for you.

3) Get in front of it.

In many cases you may already feel behind the curve. I understand that. But whatever your circumstance, now is the best time to get out in front and lead.

It starts with what I talked about in the previous point. Own it. Take responsibility. And you need to go public. (*Important note:* Not necessarily to the whole congregation, but to the appropriate group, and that may be the whole congregation.)

The only thing worse than a leader facing serious troubles is if it seems like either the leader doesn't know they're facing big problems or if they are sticking their head in the sand and doing nothing about it.

People are resilient, they can handle more than you think. Don't keep them in the dark. When trust is established, your people can be surprisingly supportive. Not everyone will be, obviously, but enough. That leads to the next point.

4) Establish who's with you.

Establishing who's with you when things aren't going well is not about allies, politics or forming a coalition. It's not about finding the people who are on your side. That never solves anything, well, not in the long run. There are no sides, it's one church. (Or you may lead one campus or one department within your church.)

I'm referring to your inner support team of trusted advisors and your key leadership base.

Let's be candid, among your key leaders there may be some who think you made a mistake. Or, you didn't handle it right. But they love and support you and the church. These leaders are invaluable because they tell you the truth and stick with you.

Talk with them, receive their counsel, pray together and make a plan. That's the next step.

5) Stick to a simple plan.

The kind of plan you need when things aren't going well is simple, concise and action-oriented.

Deep thinking is necessary, but don't over-think. Deep thinking involves deeper layers of new solutions, over-thinking is circling the same thoughts over and over again with no new results.

There is no perfect solution. Land one that is sound and the team can agree on. Then stick to it.

At risk of seeming contradiction, you must remain adaptable. The title of this point is "stick to a simple plan," and that remains true, but some steps in your plan may need to be adapted to meet new turns in your circumstance.

6) Focus on doing the right things not on being successful.

A successful outcome is the obvious desire, but if you make that the focus of your process you may be tempted to take short-cuts in order to get an early success.

You can't cut corners and get the result you really want.

It's like a church that does things to draw a crowd on Sunday morning rather than the things that will build disciples of Jesus. (Please forgive the over-generalization, but I'm confident you know what I mean.) Both ways can fill the room, but one can do it in seven days and the other takes a long time.

There simply is no instant success, especially when things aren't going well. Focus on the right things and don't give up. That takes us to the last point.

7) Face reality, but don't quit.

Remember, leaders face problems and solve them. That's what we do. That's reality. Your situation may be more difficult than what "normal" problems present, but this truth still applies.

When John Maxwell and I were at Skyline Church in San Diego we faced open opposition to relocation for ten years. Yes, a full decade! That was the reality, but we (the whole staff and congregation) didn't quit.

It turned out that our job was to find the land, pay for the land and get it re-zoned. Then Dr. Jim Garlow was the leader to build the building and relocate. That process was also filled with great

opposition, but they did it! The Skyline congregation is truly amazing!

That wouldn't have happened if the leaders or congregation quit.

Keep going, it's worth it!

> [Read more from Dan.](#)

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