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The ABC's of Leading in Tough Times

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A best selling business book proclaims what most people already knew—"You Don't Have to Have a Title to be a Leader." Therefore this article is not necessarily written for people who have the title of "Leader" but it is for anyone who is in a place of influence whether it be in at home or at work. Tough times come in various sizes and forms. Whether it is a storm in the mortgage business or a health, financial or family crisis, we have all faced trying and difficult times at different times and seasons in our lives and in our careers.

When those times come, leaders are those individuals who will intentionally look for ways to encourage, inspire and model excellence to others. Tough times will not last—but tough leaders will! The following are some basic ABC's of leading in tough times.

Attitude...is everything. It's not what is happening in the marketplace, with your company, or with your team, that will determine your destiny; it is how you handle what's happening that counts. Do you operate with a positive or negative attitude? Your team will adopt the attitude you have – make it a good one! "I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent of how I react to it," says author Charles Swindoll.

Belief. Examine your belief system. You need to believe and focus on the possible, instead of the impossible. You should believe in yourself, in the power of your team, and the purpose of your business. Do you believe with all your heart that you make a difference with your company or in your marketplace?

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is a mindset that enables you to face hard times and press on by doing brave acts. "You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face," said Eleanor Roosevelt. "You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

Determination is a cousin to courage. It means you refuse to give up, shut up or let up until you have lead your team through the hard times and taken them up to their highest possible level. Denis Waitley says "Determination gives you the resolve to keep going in spite of the roadblocks that lay before you."

Energetic leaders inspire enthusiasm with their friends, their co-workers and their team members. Now is not the time to lose your momentum. Look for ways to increase your energy levels—join a gym, eat regularly and properly, get more sleep—whatever it takes to energize you. When you are doing what you are perfectly suited for, that produces energy. Stop if you are working in a particular area that drains you of energy.

Fortitude. Do you have the quality to withstand hardship and stress? Mental toughness is a must. Develop a "whatever it takes" mindset. It is a mental fortitude that refuses to be pushed around by fear.

Gratitude. Are you truly thankful for the company you own or for which you work? For business you do have, for the lessons learned the years, for your friends, for your team or employees? A good way to begin every day is to write down three things for which you are grateful. Become a grateful person and intentionally thank someone everyday for even the smallest thing.

Heart. Your heart is the core of who you are and why you do what you do. Now is a good time to examine your "why." Your "why" will take you through any "how" or "what."

Inspire others to be the best they can be. That may be by personally coaching your team, motivating the entire company, or addressing the market conditions with referral partners and the community. Leaders breathe life into stale and stagnant places and situations and inspire others to live their lives to their fullest potential.

Join with other leaders on a regular basis. Now is not the time to try to isolate yourself and make it on your own. Join a BNI (Business Networking International) or other networking group. Listen to what is going on in other industries, their problems and concerns and their solutions. Can any of those ideas, solutions or strategies be implemented in your business?

Kindness means that you care and have concern for others. We all want a kind word spoken to us—even if we don't necessarily deserve it. A kind word can soften a volatile situation, whether with co-workers or with clients.

Listen up! One of the greatest character traits you could develop as leaders would be to develop your listening abilities. Too many times, we don't listen when others speak. We are too busy preparing our answer! Practice really listening. Listening has been described as "...using one's ears on purpose for a purpose!"

Mentor. Every leader needs a leader. Every coach needs a coach. Find someone whom you respect, whose life you admire and whose character reflects a genuineness of soul. You would be surprised at the number of people who would be flattered to share their secrets of success and even to operate as your mentor – they are just waiting for you to ask! "If I have seen farther than others, it is because I was standing on the shoulder of giants," said Isaac Newton.

Navigator. Whether you realize it or not, people are watching you; not just your actions but your reactions. Even if you don't claim the role of "leader," most of you are leading something or someone, even it's only your dog! A leader is like a navigator at sea—charting the course, directing the course of action. John Maxwell says, "A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way."

Open door philosophy. This philosophy says that you are available to all, not just the privileged few. Do people with your company or your team feel free to share their true thoughts and ideas with you? Or do they feel threatened if they offer an idea counter to yours?

Passion. Do you love what you do? When you are doing what you were created to do—your gifts and talents are at work—it actually infuses you with energy. It is almost like you are on fire! Whether it is taking applications, managing a branch, or leading a company or a team – do you have a passion for what you do and for the people who do it with you and for you? Like a fire, people will come just to watch you burn! And your passion will become contagious.

Quick resolution of problems. When troubles come, a leader must know how to analyze the situation, and take decisive action. You may not always make the right choice or the perfect decision, but take charge and make the call.

Resourceful. Not only should you be one to whom others can turn to with their problems and questions, you should also be the one who is the resource for new and creative ideas.

Significance over success. Success will never satisfy your longing for significance—only leading a life of contribution will do that—a life and work that has meaning beyond money and material possessions. Significance means that you are making a difference in the lives of others.

Trust. Does your team have absolute assurance that they can rely and depend on you – no matter what? Do they not only believe you – but they believe in you, and in your trustworthiness? Your character and your integrity?

Undivided attention. Wherever you are, be there. When you are at work, be at work. When you are at home, be at home. Too many times, we take work home, and bring home to work. Your single-minded focus on whatever task is hand will multiply your results.

Vision. "Without a vision, the people perish", the prophet wrote. And without a vision of where you want to take your life and your company, you will also become distracted and unfocused. Write a vision statement and share it with your team. "The very essence of leadership is that you have to have vision. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet," said Theodore M. Hesburgh.

Wisdom. To acquire wisdom you should study wisdom! One of the greatest books ever written on wisdom was the book of Proverbs. A business book written by Steven K. Scott, "The Richest Man Who Ever Lived," expounds on this book and the wisdom of King Solomon who was, by the way, the richest man who ever lived.

Leaders reflect wisdom through insight and understanding of the situation at hand, not by hasty judgments, shooting from the hip and from feelings and emotions. Henry David Thoreau said that one of the characteristics of wisdom is to not do desperate things.

X-ray. Develop x-ray vision and see through and beyond the surface of any problem, challenge or hurt suffered by you or your team. Look past what is going on in current markets to see what lies beneath.

Yield. There are several meanings for this word, but the one I love is "produce." Are you a productive person? Knowledge is not power and action alone is not power. Knowledge, coupled with intentional, focused action will increase your production and that is power

Zero-in on your top goals and priorities. It is called the power of focus and it is incredible. Get a clear vision of what you want. Set the goals to achieve it, schedule the daily action plans you must take to accomplish it and zero in.

After going through the above ABC's, maybe you are still wondering if you are a leader. I remind you of the words of John Quincy Adams: "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

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