



# Bent

Thoughts on leadership  
by Karl Pister



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Charles Dickens is a favorite author of mine. Certainly his work, *A Christmas Carol*, ranks among my favorites as it documents how deeply rooted behaviors can be changed as insight is gained.

In another novel, *Great Expectations*, Dickens, speaking through his character Estella, says: *Suffering has been stronger than all other teaching....I have been bent and broken, but -- I hope --- into a better shape.*

It doesn't take much to figure out how that quote, written nearly two centuries ago, applies to today. There are few among those who read this who have not suffered, or been bent or somewhat broken over the last year.





You have been on the forefront of, if history is a predictor, a once-in-a-lifetime event. The hours have been longer, the stress has been higher, the stakes have been higher, the impacts greater, than anything you have seen or experienced.

However, note the words of the quote...*suffering has been stronger than all other teaching*. This implies that teaching, and thus learning, has occurred.

The author and leadership expert, John C. Maxwell, stated: *Experience (or in this case suffering) is not the best teacher. Evaluated experience is the best teacher.*

It is not normal for the average person to sit down and reflect or evaluate. That is a higher level function. Most people, as they have been "*bent and broken*" do not want to sit and think about those experiences.

It is difficult to read any major publication currently and not see articles on the emotional and physical impact the pandemic is having on people. Given a free moment, few will sign up to consider the last ten months in any other way than wanting to forget completely about it.



However, as leaders, you cannot afford to lose the learnings and insights that have been yours over these months...

Insights about how you and others have weathered what is known as a VUCA environment... Volatile/ Uncertain/ Chaotic/ Ambiguous. I would challenge each of you, sometime during this week, to choose your top three events of the year that qualify under that acronym...that 'bent or broke' you.

Some key questions to ask:

*What were the common threads?*

*What were your responses?*

*What thinking led to the behavior?*

*Which of your reactions are you proud of?*

*Which of your reactions would you rather forget?*

*What 'better shape' have you been formed into?*

*What was left behind, and why?*

*How will you sustain your "better shape"?*



Only after you have considered what you, personally, have experienced can you lead your team in a similar exercise. As you share your insights, you will be able to inspire them to answer these questions.

Some cautions:

1. *Remember Maslow...* I wrote about that early on and it still applies. Insight drops like a rock when mental fatigue is prevalent. People will not jump into this exercise with gusto. They are too tired. Not that they need hand-holding. They do need empathy.

2. *Slow down to speed up.* You have probably done a lot of that over the last few months. Keep it up. If you have the right people in the right seat on the right bus (thanks to the author Jim Collins for that phrase) then you will have results when those seat occupants are properly inspired.

Learning comes from many places. This has been too difficult a time to not glean enormous benefit from what it has taught us.

Feel free to reach out with any questions or roadblocks that get in the way of this opportunity.



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**Karl Pister, PCC**

Leadership Coach

[karl@coachinggroupinc.com](mailto:karl@coachinggroupinc.com)

(503) 381-8705

