



# Break

Thoughts on leadership  
by Karl Pister



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My wife shared with me that a young woman, very close to our son and his family in Los Angeles, had passed away from an aggressive form of uterine cancer, leaving behind a grieving husband, reeling from this massive loss, and wondering how he will manage life without his sweetheart, and how he will break this news to a four year old and a two year old...too young to understand the cognition of the loss, but completely aware in their instinctual inner core that the central figure of their existence is inexplicably gone.





The funeral was a poignant event. Since group gathering are currently limited in California, most attended remotely. Nevertheless, as the family left for the service, friends lined the street with balloons, selves, and signs of support.

Tears well as I write this. The woman's age is identical to our marvelous daughter-in-law, and their children's ages closely parallel those of our grandchildren. Too close to home?! Absolutely.

Anything I can do about it? Nothing....except....

... now another story. One of the physicians I work with, in a coaching context, went "off topic", (his words), during a recent meeting. He was concerned about his children. He is that type of person.

The people I interviewed for his 360 review, to a person, talked about how important family is to him. And what a stellar family he has. And how he builds relationships. One person said "he is the type of person you want for a neighbor".



(It is important to note that my only two questions I ask during these reviews are:

1. What the individual does well in leadership?
2. What the person could improve in leadership?)

And yet these professional colleagues bring up his family and personal relationships as part of their leadership analysis? Why?

Because you can't separate the type of person you are in private from the type of person you are in public. The larger the disparity between the two worlds, the greater the gaps in leadership effectiveness. And the more centered you are in the personal arena, the better your chances of being strong through tragedy and turmoil.

The fact that this physician is concerned about his personal core, and knows he needs to address those issues and fortify relationships, bodes well for the reasons that we have engaged in coaching. And it takes me back to my question of...



*Anything I can do about the impact of what my wife told me?*  
Anything you can do about the impact of seeing a constant stream of Covid 19 victims and fatalities? Anything you can do about the cumulative impact you feel as a healthcare professional of lost patients, of poor outcomes, of the angst that comes from dealing on the front lines with people at their most vulnerable stage?

At the moment of the impact, perhaps not.

But somewhere in the next few days, you can replenish your reservoir of personal and leadership strength by serving those closest to you.

Meet them where they are at. Find out what they need. Meet those needs.

It might be playing Legos for an hour with a two year-old.

It might be holding the hand of a 90 year-old who is reminiscing about holidays past, telling stories you may have heard just five minutes before.

It might be reading between the lines when someone responds with a "fine" response when asked how they are and pursuing how they really are.



It might be leaving the house, staying safe, and meeting the needs of people who you don't know and might never see again.

These are the types of activities that keep you grounded when horrid things happen....and allow you to keep shining your light of vision of possibilities for those whose view has dimmed due to personal tragedy.

Whatever the holiday you observe, that is your mandate as a leader...to keep the light of vision shining. A mandate you cannot abdicate...even if you wanted to...as the leader you are.





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