



Patience

Thoughts on leadership
by Karl Pister



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This word 'patience' is not a word that fits me, or most of my clients, well. I like action. I like results. And while I like a good process, I must confess that many times I focus more on the goal than on the journey. Work in progress on that one.





However, consider the life histories of a Martin Luther King, a Nelson Mandela, a James Stockdale, who, when presented with societal situations fully beyond their control, put into practice the quality of patience that can give all of us pause to reflect on what it gave them and what it could give us.

Please remember that patience is not passivity. It actually is very proactive...just from another perspective.

In King's situation, it was climbing a mountain of societal prejudice and injustice in the face of brutal odds and opposition. Mandela spent decades in prison before leading his country out of racial injustice.

Mandela commented:

"I realized that they could take everything from me except my mind and my heart. They could not take those things. Those things I still had control over. And I decided not to give them away."



Consider what happened to Stockdale, who was the highest ranking POW in the prisons of North Vietnam from 1965 to 1973.

"After being shot down over Vietnam in 1965, Navy fighter pilot James Stockdale spent over seven years in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" prison, enduring repeated episodes of torture, leg irons that sliced into his skin, and four years in isolation.

Stockdale's decision began soon after he ejected from his burning airplane. In the 30 seconds before he landed, Stockdale accepted that soon nearly everything would be outside his control - even his own body.

But his opinions, judgements and attitudes, his grief and joy? Those feelings were entirely within his control.

Stockdale kept a routine that included hundreds of pushups while shackled and devised an elaborate communication system between prisoners to boost morale.

He stated 'You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end - which you can never afford to lose - with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.'



As one article stated, "The goal is to stay in the middle. Not getting angry or despondent, but staying calm and persistent, accepting the uncertainty gracefully for as long as it takes... It's the recognition that the goodness or badness of your life will ultimately depend on how you react to things".

Simple, profound, and very challenging words to truly live by.

So, what is your role as a leader, considering the above reading?

1. To determine what your reaction patterns are. Are you leading by example?
2. To determine where those you lead are on their current journey.
3. And, to take on the responsibility to teach and guide those that may be struggling.
4. And repeat and repeat and repeat.

These are very challenging times. As one person commented the other day. *"Act and lead over the next few months in a way that you will be proud to look back upon".*



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