



30,000-Foot Level Leadership

Thoughts on leadership
by Karl Pister



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One of the first leaders in my career always spoke of getting up to 30,000 feet, figuratively, to get a better perspective on issues. As I write this, I am literally at 34,000 feet on an Alaska Airlines flight to Salt Lake City today on March 12th. The air is calm, the sky is a brilliant blue and I am looking at the window and seeing the volcanoes of the Cascade range spread to the north and south.





Much different than what is
happening at ground level:

- Covid 19 spreading seemingly without limits
- Responses, both well-thought and panicked, to the actual or perceived threat
- A healthcare system that is struggling to consider how to provide care for a virus that is undefined
- A stock market that has lost 25% over the last three weeks
- An economy that is seemingly unable to establish traction in the current whirlwind
- A professional and collegiate sports world that has practically shut down

As *humans* we will have varied responses to these situations. As *leaders*, our options are much more limited. They are limited because there are some things we can and cannot do.



What we can do



1. We can be the face and example of calm, assuredness, and resolve.

The example of Winston Churchill in the face of the German onslaught during the blitzkrieg in World War II comes to mind. Morning walks through the rubble from the night's devastation of carpet bombings. Did this do anything material to solve anything? A resounding 'no'.

Did it do everything to set an example to the British people that their Prime Minister was in the forefront of the situation and was mindful of them? A resounding 'yes'. And what did that result in? An increase of the legendary British resolve to, in Churchill's own words "never, never, never, never give up".

2. We can communicate morning, noon, and night.

- Our charge, as a leader, be it of an OR or a healthcare organization, is to be out among the people, asking the questions, listening to the answers, and reassuring the fears and concerns.
- Even if we don't know the answers to the questions, our presense on the floor will be crucial. There is no replacement, and there is certainly no way to justify system emails or newsletters as a communication medium to replace the morning walks through the rubble.
- Establish our vision and repeat it continuously, from various perspectives, in any situation we can.



3. We can inspire them to move beyond the moment and rise to their figurative 30,000 feet.

And we will have to know them in order to connect with them and we will have to leave our offices and the boardroom in order to do that.

Even if we don't know the answers to the questions, our presence on the floor will be crucial.



| **What we cannot do**



- 1. We cannot follow the common thought unless the common thought is valid and well grounded*
- 2. We cannot hide behind the door of indecision*
- 3. We cannot let our tense emotions influence our reactions or actions. We must zealously filter our fears, for we are the ones that people look to to calm theirs.*

Great leadership is rarely defined during calm times. And your people need your great leadership, at whatever level you may be leading.

So. Get up. Get out. Talk. Connect. Listen. Empathize. Inspire...and repeat. Let those that support you focus on the details of the day-to-day business. Only you can lead from the top level in regards to the human element. This you cannot delegate. What you do over the next few weeks and months will have a significant impact on what will occur when this current crisis passes.

And, as you well know, reach out at any time to discuss any concerns you have or to assist you to stay at your 30,000 foot level.

Karl



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