



What Counts

Thoughts on leadership
by Karl Pister





Albert Einstein is credited with this quote: "many of the things you can count, do not count. Many of the things you cannot count, really do count."

I know all of you who received these messages. For some, the counting aspects of their work dominates their world. Throughput, budgets, staffing, forecasts. As is said for many non-profit organizations - 'No money. No mission'. Can't disagree.





I would like, however, to put a strong word in, yet again, during this incredible whirlwind of Covid 19 that you are battling, to consider what you are counting and make sure it is the top priority.

Consider the following story, taken from an article:

"Seven months into his second term, President George W. Bush flew over New Orleans in Air Force One. He peered out the window as photographer Jim Watson released the shutter on his camera. It was August 31, 2005 and the plane was returning the President to Washington from his ranch in Texas.

Below the large white and baby-blue jet was the Gulf Coast, ravaged by Hurricane Katrina just two days prior. Levees built to protect the city had failed as Katrina surged, killing more than 1800 people and totalling more than \$161 billion dollars in damage. Survivors needed water, food, shelter, emergency medical care and for someone to lift them from the flood.



Watson's now famous portrait captures the president looking - in Bush's own words - 'detached and uncaring'. The photo would become symbolic to the administration's handling of the natural disaster.

Years later Bush understands the consequences of the decision he made in 2005. He said that he worried at the time that emergency responders would be distracted by his visit instead of saving lives.

'In retrospect, however, I should have touched down in Baton Rouge, met with the governor and walked out and said: 'I hear you. We understand. And we're going to help the state and help the local governments with as much resources as needed.' And then got onto a flight up to Washington. I did not do that. And paid a price for it'.

It would have been so easy to make that personal contact and let them know, through the simple phrases he put so well in retrospect, that he HAD THEIR BACKS.

In an interview in the Wall Street Journal on Sunday, Enrique Lores, CEO of Hewlitt Packard stated, regarding his corporation's actions during the Covid 19 crisis " Right now is when we show the value and culture of HP".



What is the senior leader's role in a crisis? To point the people to the light at the end of the tunnel!

So, some quick questions to drive home the points:

- *Is there anything in your behavior or actions that could communicate being detached or uncaring?*
- *What are you doing now to establish, or underscore, behaviors that speak to values you hold personally, or that you personify as a leader in your organization?*
- *What are you counting that matter? Are you sure that it matters?*

Again, with that, I am not saying the numbers don't count. During times of crisis, your people need to know where they stand with you and what the numbers might mean. However, if they sense that you care more about your Excel spreadsheet than about them, you will not see good results. This is not an either/or proposition. You know where you stand on this. Don't fool yourself with long-held rationales if you know that the people equation is not on par with the numbers and the day-to-day logistics of managing through a crisis.



So again, back to Einstein...are you counting what matters and do the '**what matters**' know you have their back?





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