

Part 1 Notes: Leading Through Crisis with Craig Groeschel

My original talk was about defeating the four enemies of growth, but I couldn't predict the fifth enemy—COVID-19. This is a complicated and difficult time. It is an unprecedented season in our lifetime! There are no clear answers and we're in uncharted territory.

Most everyone is experiencing varying degrees of discomfort about the future:

- Some (more vulnerable) are terrified of getting sick.
- Some are afraid of losing their job.
- Others have already lost hours or lost their job completely.

Many of **YOU** have an extra layer of pressure:

- You aren't just worried about your job.
- You're concerned about your business or your church.
- You're concerned about your employees—their families—people who depend on you!

What do we do? How do we lead through uncertainty? Lead during crisis? How do you lead when you've got no clue what's coming? How do you lead when you are afraid? Unsure? Lacking confidence?

Leadership is always important—more important now than ever.

Today I want to give you a perspective, some suggestions and encouragement.

Let's start with some perspective...

This is a very real global crisis. It's not the first in the history of the world and it won't be the last. We will get through this. Will it be hard? Yes, it already is. Will things be different? Likely so! Will we get through this? Eventually!

Also, important to remember...

- Every major crisis creates unexpected problems. (Too many to count)
- Every major crisis also creates unprecedented opportunities.
- We have more and different problems today than a month ago.
- There are more and different opportunities that we had a month ago.

3 Different Types of Opportunities We Should be Looking For:

Some opportunities are **practical**.

- Now you have an excuse to make some changes you should have made.
- I had a mentor who always said... "Don't ever waste a crisis."
- What's confusing during good times becomes clear during bad times.
- A crisis often creates clarity!
- It might become clear to you that you need to adjust expenses, eliminate fluff, close, depart, redeploy or narrow your focus.

Some opportunities are **financial**.

- This will create investing opportunities or business opportunities.
- Those who can see needs and respond quickly can create value, build business and develop ministry.
- There are lots of financial opportunities for the few that see them and seize them.

Many opportunities are **missional**.

- There are more people in need today who weren't in need a month ago and there are new opportunities to help them.
- If you're a pastor, some people are more open spiritually today than they were a month ago. It's an opportunity to speak into people's lives.
- Businesses can meet needs too. GM and Tesla are providing respirators; commercial airlines are providing cargo; a local trucking department is using trucks to ship groceries, food and supplies where they're needed.
- Churches are opening their doors as a day care for hospital workers or testing centers for Covid-19!

Let's remember, every crisis creates problems and opportunities, but most people just see the problems. Leaders must address the problems *and* seize the opportunities!

Continuing our thoughts about perspective, let's not miss the obvious—that as leaders, we must clearly define the problems we are facing. This seems insultingly obvious, but many leaders don't do this!

Some leaders just start diving in without clearly defining the problem. It's important to step back to be proactive instead of reactive to problems.

Defining the 4 Problems:

What are our current problems? This is different for all of us depending on what country, state or industry we're in, but there are some similarities.

1. COVID-19 is a problem!

We don't want people to get sick.

2. Fear and panic are problems.

I heard one person say we have two pandemics. We've got a viral pandemic and a social pandemic—and everyone is spreading fear. The virus is a problem. Fear is a problem. We have to name it.

3. Cascading economic impact is a problem.

Some people I trust are projecting the physical pain and trauma may be worse from the economy than the virus. As the economy falls, despair increases. The economic hits lead to depression, mental health challenges, substance abuse, potential domestic abuse, potential rise in suicides... and then when you think about already impoverished countries, the lives hurt could be devastating.

4. Public perception is a real issue.

Once you start to identify the problem, you'll want to create a short-term plan. During the early season of this crisis there were two cases in my home state. Would have it been safe for us to meet? What's right is that we could have met, and we might have been safe. But even though what we could have done could have been safe, if we are not aware of public perception, we could have had a real problem. If we communicate that we value our gathering over keeping people alive is a real issue. It's important to communicate that safety is more important. You'll have to deal with when to re-open your church or organization and how your team and community will respond to that.

Priorities:

It should become clear that there are only a few things that matter!

4 Tiers of Effectiveness:

1. What is mission critical?
2. What is strategic and important?
3. What is important but not essential?
4. What is externally initiated?

Clearly define your tiers. Keep focused on tier one and tier two topics right now. Focus on mission critical things. You're going to be tempted to do lots of things. Don't. Everyone is going to have ideas—good ideas. Focus your energy toward the biggest priorities.

Create a plan around these mission critical things.

Do these 2 things when you are devising a plan:

1. Expect to get it wrong.

There is no road map. You will have lots of false starts. Things are changing too rapidly. Tell your team you'll be adapting.

2. Think long term but limit your plan to short term.

People ask me, how long is this going to last? Will this be over in a few weeks? I have no idea. I have to plan to do church online long term because I'd rather be pleasantly surprised than constantly disappointed. How long? I'd be foolish to predict that, but I'm thinking long term and deciding day to day, hour by hour. Things are changing every day. Be wise to think worst case scenario, but don't create fear.

Do these 3 things when you communicate:

1. Communicate Empathetically

Unfortunately, most of your team members first thought isn't about your business, your non-profit or your church. By nature, they are asking, "How will this impact me? My family?" They are understandably afraid.

You will want to acknowledge their fears and speak to them. Help them know you understand what they are feeling. Don't be afraid to say what people are thinking. Do everything you can to value your employees. They won't follow you if they don't believe you understand. Help them know you genuinely care about them!

2. Communicate Truthfully

Tell the truth, even when the truth is negative, uncertain or scary. This is so important.

I've seen some leaders say, "It's going to be fine! It'll be over in no time." But as leaders, we don't motivate through a crisis, we lead through a crisis. This is not a time for motivation, this is a time for wise decisions, and leading through the crisis. Be realistic and truthful.

Jim Collins writes about this in Good to Great. He talks about Admiral Jim Stockdale, the highest-ranking U.S. military officer in one of worst POW camps during Vietnam War who survived an 8-year imprisonment. He was tortured 20 times with no certainty of living, no promise of freedom and no hope of surviving. Even though he was a prisoner, he was in command and helped other POWs survive.

When people asked him, "Who didn't make it out? Who didn't survive?" He said, "The answer is easy—the optimists" It was those who believed they'd be out by Christmas. Then by Easter—they couldn't take the devastation.

"This is a very important lesson. 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."

Tell your team the truth, even if truth is negative, uncertain or scary. People can handle bad news better than no news and the fear that comes with not knowing.

So, tell them, you don't know—you aren't sure. The only thing you want to promise them—whatever you decide—it's going to change. So, adjust. That's why you speak confidently, but not definitely. You are certain your team will make wise decisions as you know more, but you don't know enough to project way into the future today. We're not making promises. We're confident, calm—we're leaders.

3. Communicate Frequently

You cannot over-communicate. Every day, things are changing, sometimes by the hour. Every day, they have new questions, concerns and fears. Our various campus staff normally meet all together four times a year. Now we are meeting online every week—sometimes twice a week. Our church normally works on the weekends, but we also added a midweek service and our normally monthly communication is now weekly. Our campus staff team is calling every member of our church asking them if they need anything. We're increasing the frequency of communication.

With every communication explain "why" as often as possible. People will go along with the what when they understand why! You're going to make a lot of decisions based on the information you have, but your team might not have all that information. That's why you need to be clear about the why before the what.

Practical advice:

1. Cut any unnecessary expenses. Cash is king. We have no idea how long this will last or how bad will be. Cash to your business is like oxygen to your body. If your team is going to need to make sacrifices, you go first, and you sacrifice the most. If everyone is taking a 20% pay cut, you take 40%.

2. It may seem obvious—take care of yourself! Like many of you, I haven't had a real day off in weeks! Sleep, unplug, walk, laugh, see your kids! Put your own oxygen mask on, and then put it on others.

Q&A

What's your highest priority in a time of crisis?

My first priority was how we minister to people. How do we bring the meat of what we do to people digitally? When we created the Church Online platform, we didn't realize this, but we built a boat before it started to rain, and now 18,000 churches who have come on board to the church online platform. So, now we're helping thousands of people do church online. We had to reallocate resources, because that was top priority for us.

Outside of my industry, having current and real information to make necessary decisions in the moment. Answer the question, based on what we know, what is right, now? Don't let all the other energy take you away from those things. Let's do the things that impact the most. What creates the most revenue or margin?

How do we care for people and extend compassion while still needing them to lead our business forward?

I would start every bit of communication with a you-centered message instead of a me-centered or business-centered message. Let people know you understand what they're going through. Acknowledge the difficulty, and then speak to what is important to them. Let them know you'll work together. Don't tell them you need them to keep your business afloat, it's about being in this together. Let people know you want to do everything you can to help them be successful. Together, we all end up in a better place. Trust your instincts. If you're asking the question, it means you care.

Any tips for making video conference meetings more meaningful?

Give yourself permission to meet outside of making decisions. Try to make it social. Get into their world. Feel what they're going through. Be empathetic.

When you are making decisions, be efficient with your meetings. Add value. Answer the question, so what?

How do I work with my team who is struggling with how rapidly things are evolving?

Think differently about how you think about change. People don't dislike change; they don't like how we try to change them. People change their haircuts, shoes, where they live, what they eat, lose weight, what they learn. During this time, let people see why staying here is not acceptable. Help people see why we can't stay the same. We need to help them understand why where we're going is better. You're going to have your critics, your advocates and bystanders. Your why is important and will help move people along.

When this is over, work on creating a culture that doesn't resist change. The only thing that is certain is that things are going to change. We don't improve without change. The why is the key to empowering a team to make the move toward change.

What systems are being maximized during this crisis?

Tech deliverables to thousands and working remotely. Driving culture where we are not. Email lists are more important. Podcasts and video devotionals on social media. Some things became obsolete like physical groups. A system is how things get done. Be clear as to what is expected and correct if it's not working. Celebrate when it's done well.

How can I ask for the sale if this is needed without sounding to greedy?

It should sell itself if it is viable. Don't be afraid to ask for the sale if this really is a viable service that is still needed. Continue to close the sale if adding value. People still pay for things they value.

What's the best way to lead your team when some are skeptical to the new procedures?

Be clear and walk it through as to the why you are leading this way. Acknowledge the why to protect people. Thank people for being flexible. If you're clear about how you got to the decision, they'll be more likely to buy it. There's no perfect decision to make right now. If we err on the side of caring for others, and explain it like that, reasonable people will go with that. We don't like it, but we can not like it together.

To what degree of vulnerability should we share?

Practicing calculated, strategic vulnerability is key. Be wise. Be selective in how you say it. Don't fall apart in front of them but empathize with them. You want to be vulnerable to connect with their hearts. Tell people what is appropriate but with a posture of confidence that we will get through this. Connect with their head and their heart. It's empathy and confidence.

Closing thoughts:

I've worked hard to not talk about layoffs... Many of you will be making those decisions, which is the hardest part of job! When you do make those decisions, they know you will be as generous as you can! Don't feel bad when you feel bad about. Give your permission to hurt—cry! Be prepared to hurt. Don't run from the pain! Step into it! Step into the pain—Lead! Some businesses won't make it. Some ministries will shut the doors. If you do, remember it's not over. Just because a business fails—doesn't make you a failure! Failure is an event—never a person. You can rise again!

If you're scared, welcome to the party. We're all scared. I believe you are where you are because you were chosen to be where you are. You don't have to know it all, but you just have to show up and make the wisest decisions you know to make. You won't get it all right but be honest. Try to make the best decisions you can. Create value. Leadership is not about you, it's about the people you lead. It's going to take crazy courage and difficult decision.