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# **Preface**

**The Unavoidable Responsibilities of A Leader**

The content of this book was birth out of my desire to develop the leaders that were under my leadership within a school district. In the spring of 2015, I was given the opportunity to serve as the Superintendent of Schools. This opportunity came with so many great benefits. I had heard about the benefits that were associated with the role, but it was an eye opener when I assumed the role. However, those benefits came with enormous responsibilities. Responsibilities that you learn about in your superintendent preparation courses: budgeting, curriculum, personnel, law, and etc.

This book will explore those responsibilities that are not taught in the preparation courses. My goal along with Dr. Larry Haynes, the writer of chapter four, was to explore the responsibilities that allow you to do the responsibilities that you learn in the preparation courses most effectively. Larry and I have a combined leadership experience of over 30 years. We have learned that how you use information is what is important. These responsibilities cannot be avoided by leaders that want to sustain their leadership.

# **Introduction**

**The Unavoidable Responsibilities of A Leader**

Many people desire to be leaders in organizations. They desire the benefits that comes with the position: salary, power, prestige, networks, and etc. However, they don’t understand the magnitude of the responsibilities that comes along with those benefits. Responsibilities that includes leaving a trail, responsible communication, nurturing followers, providing hope, and managing crises to name a few. How an individual handles those responsibilities determines the level of leader they will become. John Maxwell describes leadership as influence. He suggests that leadership is simply having influence on people. Yes, a position grants you a degree of leadership, but how you develop influence among those under your leadership determines if they will allow you to lead them. Influence is built by developing trust among your followers. Trust is built as people observe how you handle the responsibilities that have been entrusted to you. In this book we will explore some critical responsibilities that a leader must master.

**1**

# **Leaving A Trail**

***Care Enough To Share***

Dr. Adrian B. Johnson, in the book *Reality Leadership*, tells a story of a trail that led from his childhood home to his grandparents’ home. He explains how important that trail was in giving him direction to those whom he loved. Unfortunately, one day the trail disappeared. Without having a trail to follow, it allowed fear to control his behavior. The fear of becoming lost along the way confined him to his home. Many potential leaders are confined to where they are in their careers due to the fear of getting lost along the way to leadership. Leadership can be frightening. The idea that the success or failure of an organization is dependent on the decisions of the leader. The thought of “the buck stops here” is too overwhelming for some to continue down the pathway to leadership. Leaders have the responsibility of leaving a trail for those who come behind them to assist in navigating the maze of leadership.

*Sharing Your Experiences*

Reading books about leadership is good. However, there are many situations that leaders are confronted with that are not found in books. Some things are only learned from life experiences. As a young first year superintendent, I thought I was ready for just about every situation. I had bought into John Maxwell’s philosophy of leadership. I knew the “Rule of Five” for leadership by memory, but what I was awakened to one fall morning could not be found in any book. I was attending a conference in Austin when I received a call from the district’s Director of Communication. I knew it must be important if Loraine was calling me while I was at a conference. She was extremely skilled at her job, and she rarely needed my assistance. She informed me that one of our first grade students and her mother had been killed in a hit and run. As if that wasn’t enough, she went on to say that the driver may be one of our coaches. Nothing in my superintendent preparation courses nor any of the books on leadership had an answer to how I should respond to this. A million questions raced through my mind: What should I say to the media? What would I say to the family? What would I say to the students and staff? Remember, I had only been a superintendent less than six months.

Then, I remembered how I had gotten to this point in my career. I had followed the trails that have been left for me. I began calling current and retired superintendents that had been great mentors to me my entire career. My first two calls were to guys that have never let me down, Dr. Steve Johnson and Dr. Adrian Johnson. With a combined experience of over thirty years as superintendents, I knew they could give me some direction that I could trust. No, they did not have experience in dealing with the exact situation, but they both had dealt with crises situations as superintendents that would serve as a trail to follow in my situation.

The responsibility of leaving a trail does not mean that you have to leave a path that is exactly like the situations of those who will follow after you. Honestly, few situations are the same; however, concepts of handling them are the same. The trails that were left for me in my situation were critical to my leadership. For example, being nonjudgmental and empathic to the entire situation as I chose my words to convey to everyone. Additionally, I learned that in a time of crisis the timing of what you say can be more important than what you say. One of the most important things that Dr. Steve Johnson told me was to journal the situation. At that time I was not understanding that what he was really saying was to be sure to be intentional about leaving a trail. Dr. Adrian Johnson in his book *Reality Leadership* called it remembering to drag your feet. The best way to ensure that a trail remains fresh is by dragging your feet as you walk along it. As we move along the leadership path, we must ensure that the trail remains fresh for those who will follow us.

In keeping the trail fresh, it is good to share your emotional state that comes along with experiences. Aspiring leaders must understand that there will be seasons of sunshine as well as seasons of rain. My first three years as Superintendent was during a season that brought more sunshine than rain. Yes, I had some rough days to get through. For example, a bus accident my first day of the job. However, those years were filled with the sunshine of going to the State Football championship game three years in a row. Winning the crown two of those years. It was during this time that my team and I implemented many wonderful programs that would soon benefit students for a lifetime. It seemed like during that time that I could do no wrong.

As in life the leadership season changed. I found myself being frustrated. I had been dedicated to my craft, but the recognition of my hard work seemed to come so slow. I knew I was doing the right things, but the organization was growing in every area except in the one that mattered the most in the eyes of the Texas Education Agency. I was left to wonder whether I was pulling the right levers. Had my season of leadership passed? Was I there only to bring the organization only so far? Or was the organization’s ceiling not high enough to be occupied by success? I was faced with the frustration of a leader of a struggling organization. I came to understand why frustrated leaders leave struggling organizations. It is because the journey is long, and the hill is so steep. So as soon as a leader gathers a little traction they find an easier job. Many will say the leader moved on out of fear, for a promotion, or selfishness. When the true reason is frustration. In my situation the academic season changed, and I was able to enjoy the fruits of my labor when the district received an academic rating of a “B” in the Texas academic rating system. In leaving a trail, we must prepare aspiring leaders to be able to deal with the emotional roller coaster that you are forced to ride as a leader. One way this is done is by sharing your experience.

*Sharing Your Time*

I believe an important part of leaving a trail is being willing to spend time with aspiring leaders. Leaders must make themselves accessible to those who will follow us. Seek out opportunities to share your leadership experiences with aspiring leaders. Oftentimes, we get so involved in our daily work as a leader that we forget to invest in those that are aspiring to be in our position. We try to set good examples for them to follow in our daily behaviors. We show them how to handle different situations as a leader. Honestly speaking, we do those things to ensure their success in the roles. Understand that our success is interwoven in their success. To truly invest in aspiring leaders is to do it from a selfless mindset. This time should be all about them; this requires creating opportunities to help them be intentional about their growth.

Within the organization in which you are leading you create these opportunities in many ways. As superintendent, I created an Aspiring Leadership Academy for aspiring leaders. This had two categories within it. One category was for those that were aspiring to be campus leaders. The goal of this category was to equip those individuals with all of the tools of being a campus leader prior to getting the role. All participants already had their Principal’s certification, but this academy would give them what they did not get in school. They would get real world experiences of actually doing the job as a Principal. It was a ten month program that allowed them to complete projects that a setting Principal should be doing at a particular time of the year. Additionally, they got access to key central office leaders that would be critical to their success as a campus leader. For example, Chief Financial Officer, Director of Communications, Director of Human Resources, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum to name a few.

The other category of the Aspiring Leadership Academy was for those who desired the Superintendent’s chair. This was a much smaller group of individuals. These were individuals that were already at least at the Principal’s level. The goal for this group was for them to get an up close look at the role of the Superintendent. I strived to give them a transparent look at how I functioned as a Superintendent. I allowed them to attend many functions such as budget meetings, bond meetings, staffing meetings, and board meetings to name a few. I created think tanks for them to wrestle with situations that I had handled within the community, and with the board. I spent a lot of time teaching them how to handle board relationships. Understanding that this is the most important relationship of all within the district as it pertains to sustaining yourself as a superintendent. Keeping a clear perspective of who the district belongs to is key. I always keep what I learned in the Bob Thompson’s Superintendents academy at the forefront of my mind. “It is their school, their kids, and their money.” They have only trusted you to oversee it. It doesn’t belong to you. This is crucial to keep in mind as you work with the board.

Investing in aspiring leaders that are not within your organizations requires a little bit more effort. The main thing that it requires of you is to be assessable. Make time to take their calls when they call. Be willing to be a sounding board when they find themselves in difficult situations. Don’t be the leader that say’s call me when you need me, but you never answer. Also, make yourself available for “lunch and learns” with aspiring leaders. I got this philosophy from John Maxwell. As I was growing myself as a leader, I read this in John Maxwell’s *Five Levels of Leadership* as a means of investing in your leadership. As I begin to seek out those to participate in these sessions, I quickly found out that this would be harder than I thought. Many high level executives within organizations keep their circle tight, and are very particular of who they allow in their circle. I did not understand why this was such until I became a high level executive. At that time, I realized that so many people desire to be in your circle to have access to the resources within your organizations. They are not concerned with growing themselves as leaders, but to tap into your resources. Knowing this, I keep myself assessable to aspiring leaders after they have been vetting. Those who truly desires to grow makes it through the vetting process.

*Sharing Your Resources*

A trail to follow is a great tool to have as you navigate your way, but having resources to get you to where you are going is even better. Many times we see the path that we must take, but do not have the resources to get there. These resources are not always financial resources. These resources can be time, intellectual capita, or political capita. Time is the most valuable of these resources that can be shared. We all are given the same investment of time each day. The reality of time is that you can’t borrow it from yesterday nor can you carry it over to tomorrow. Today’s investment of time is only for today. So who you share it with is really important. Sharing your time with an aspiring leader is a valuable contribution. One never knows the impact of sharing that resource. The time you spend with an aspiring leader may help save his/her career. A word spoken during a “lunch and learn” session could help sustain a leadership dream.

Intellectual capita is a resource that is critical to the success of aspiring leaders. One of the most difficult things on my leadership journey was figuring out what I did not know. The truth of the matter is that you only know what you have experienced, what you have heard, or what you have been told. During my first year as a Superintendent, I longed for the completion of a year. Until that time everything was being done for the first time. I was relying on what had always been done, other’s experience, and what others were willing to share with me. As experienced leaders, we must share our intellectual capita. There is so much intellectual capita that we have gained. Some of us have become experts in some areas through research and experiences. Some leaders are afraid to share their intellectual capita because they believe that is what sets them apart from others in a profession. An effective leader realizes that sharing intellectual capita promotes the entire profession while sustaining you as a professional. It is through the sharing of intellectual capita that we gain more intellectual capita. Oftentimes, our intellectual capita on a particular subject is sharpened as we share it. Others have the opportunity to challenge it when it is shared. When it is challenged we can gain a better understanding of what we already knew or learn something new about it. Nevertheless, we must share our intellectual capita as a valuable resource.

Political capita is a resource that is often overlooked. This is capita that you have gained within an organization, a community, and/or within a profession over time. This is developed by building relationships, and making good decision. Political capita simple is how much trust you have developed. This is something that you share with aspiring leaders to help them build their political capita. Many will trust what they say or do based on your political capita. We as experience leaders do not carelessly share our political capita because how it is used could make or break us.

Leaving a trail for those to follow is a responsibility that a leader cannot avoid. In doing so, he is doing his part in lighting the path for future leaders. Honestly, we are only doing what was done for us. There are very few people that accomplishes their goals without having a trail to follow. Those that do are called trailblazers. You never know that may be what you will be considered.

**2**

# **Responsible Communication**

***A Leader’s Words Initiates Actions***

A leader’s ability to communicate effectively is vital to the success of any organization that they have been given the honor of leading. We all communicate every day of our lives, but we have to be conscious of whether or not we are communicating effectively. Communicating effectively can be determined by so many factors: timing, tone, body language, written, spoken, and relationships are a few examples. Being an effective communicator is being a responsible communicator. A responsible communicator understands that being careless with their communication is detrimental to their success as a leader. Underestimating the power of your words, knowing the importance of clarity and appropriate messaging are the keys to being responsible with your communication.

*The Power of a Leaders Words*

As a leader you must realize that your words have power. Many people are affected by what comes from your mouth or from your body. People are constantly reading you for cues on how they must respond to you at every moment. As a first year Superintendent, I struggled with underestimating the power of my words. My first year on the job I could not understand why people would respond so quickly to a comment that I would make about something. For example, while making my normal walks of the district’s facilities I would see something that needed to be addressed. I would call the maintenance director to only make him aware of it. My intentions were not for it to be addressed immediately; underestimating the power of my words, I did not realize that he would perceive my phone call as something that needed to be addressed immediately. His understanding was if the Superintendent is calling me we must stop what we are doing to address his concern. This is just one example of me underestimating the power of my words.

When you understand the power of your words, you are extremely cautious of who you think out loud around. You must remember that many of your followers are looking to please you. Their desire is to make sure they are accomplishing things the exact way you would like them. This is another area that I had to get under control as a first year Superintendent. Thinking out loud is a normal way that I process situations. Oftentimes, I have to talk myself through the situation. During that conversation, I may mention a few possible ways to handle the situation. I didn’t understand that me thinking out loud could be perceived by my employees as “set in stone” solutions. Thank God that I had a great relationship with my Deputy Superintendent that could bring that to my attention. To help my employees with responding to my behavior. I began stating my intentions when I began the conversations. For example, I would say something like, “I am only thinking out loud” or “this is not immediate”. This was a part of me being a responsible communicator. The responsible communicator realizes that his words are powerful. Your word initiates actions by your followers, intended or not.

*The Importance of Clarity*

Due to the fact that a leaders words are extremely powerful, a leader can’t afford to be unclear in his communication. Unclear communication by a leader can cost an organization’s time, money, and its reputation. When there is not clarity in a leader’s communication time is wasted by having to constantly repeat duties. Unclear communication leaves room for mistakes to be made by your followers in meeting the leader’s expectations. I can remember when we were dealing with two difficult issues within the district that I did not communicate clearly. It was during the Corona virus pandemic of 2021. Schools all over the country were trying to take every measure to keep everyone safe while attempting to maintain normalcy on campuses. At the same time, schools were faced with another wave of school shootings. I saw an opportunity to assist with addressing both issues with one solutions. A company was making metal detectors with temperature readers on them. I saw this as an opportunity to assist with mitigating the spread of the virus and an attempt to keep weapons out of the buildings. I communicated this to my team, but because I was not clear in my communications everyone did not understand the urgency of accomplishing the task. There was a delay in installing the devices, and there was not a plan of operations in place because I assumed everyone understood what needed to be done. I communicated but I was not clear. As you probably know, it wasted a lot of people’s time.

Another area where a lack of clarity in communication by the leader can cost an organization is in the area of finances. High level leaders in an organization have access to millions of dollars. Clarity is vital when you are making deals that involve money. Lack of clarity can be a problem in purchasing items, structuring of building projects, employee compensations, and employee contracts to name a few. For example, my organizations were trying to implement a performance incentive for our teachers. It took us at least six months to prepare for the introductions of this plan because of the importance of clarity in communicating it. I had no idea the level of effort people would put into getting around the system to get a few extra dollars.

On another occasion, I underestimated the cost on a bond project due to unclear communications. It is critical to ask the right questions when you are communicating because the wrong question will get you the wrong answer. I asked for the cost of a cosmetology lab. My team gave me the cost of the materials and supplies of the lab, but I wanted the total cost of renovating the lab. There is no quicker way for a leader’s lack of clarity in his communication to cost them their job than in finance. People can tolerate mistakes in some areas, but not when they begin to cost the organization money.

*Appropriate Messaging*

The glue that sticks all aspects of responsible communication together is appropriate messaging. Appropriate messaging ensures that the correct message is conveyed in what is being communicated. There are so many elements that goes into appropriate messaging. Tone, body language, timing, wording, and method. There have been many times that I was misunderstood because of the tone that I used in the conversation. By nature, I am a passionate guy. This passion can be mistaken for anger sometimes. I remember having a conversation with a Principal about a situation. I was very direct and animated about getting something done, but I did not realize that my voice was getting louder and louder about it and she began to cry. Making her cry was or making her feel like she was not doing a good job was not my intent. She was doing an outstanding job with the situation, but my tone sent the wrong message.

I have found in this modern era of technology that texting and emails can quickly lead to inappropriate messaging. I have seen so many wrong decisions made as the result of a text message or email. A responsible communicator understands what method to use when communicating certain situations. Due to the fact that so many factors go into conversation, some things are best said in person. You can’t see a person’s body language through a text or an email. You can’t use the assistance of a touch to display the heart through an email. Use of technology can leave too many gaps in the conversation that can be misinterpreted and misunderstood. Yes as a leader there are many conversations that will need to be documented. A responsible communicator know how to follow up those types of conversations with a follow up written recap of the meeting.

**3**

# **Nurturing Followers**

***Followers Are Always People***

I believe one of the most overlooked responsibilities of a leader is nurturing followers. Leaders oftentimes get so consumed with getting productivity out of their followers that they forget that they are human beings. That is what makes leading people so difficult some times. Every individual comes with their own set of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs. Far too often leaders attempt to grow employees in their respective roles, but not grow them as people. I have tried to separate the person from the role, and it simply does not work. As a leader, a critical responsibility is nurturing the person that is in the role as you grow them as a professional. There are two key aspects of nurturing followers: protecting them and valuing them.

*Protection*

After the death of my aunt Bobbie, my mom thought it necessary to discuss my family history with me. You see, her and aunt Bobbie were so close that we called them wet and water. You could not have one without the other. What sparked the conversation was me asking about a child that aunt Bobbie lost that I knew nothing about. After she answered my question, I thought this is a great time to ask my mom about a conversation that we had never discussed. My father. Unfortunately, I had never met him. At the time I was 49 years old, and had always wondered about him. What was he like as a man, and why did mom leave him to come back home to grandma? When I asked mom to tell me about him, she began to tear up. She stated, “Your father was a good man when he was not drinking. He became very abusive when he got intoxicated.” She continued by saying, “My breaking point was when you were six months old, your brother was 4, and your sister was 6. He was abusing me, and your 4 year old brother tried to protect me. He threw your brother across the room, and you fell down some stairs in your walker.” She said it was at that moment that she had to get us all away from him. My mother privately saved her money to buy three bus tickets to get from California to Texas. She slipped away from my father secretly. She never saw him again to protect us. She had to make the tough decision to hurt me by not allowing me to know him, but to love me more to protect me. I tell this story because as a leader a part of nurturing followers sometimes requires you to protect them. Protect them from people, situations, and sometimes themselves. A leader has the responsibility to make unpopular decisions in order to protect their followers. That requires the leader to realize that he is leading people and not machines. People have emotions, thoughts, ideas, and ambitions. The leader must encourage and support those things while at the same time protecting them from those things.

*Value The Seed*

I have tried my hand at gardening a few times, and found out that I don't have a green thumb. For some reason I can't get my seed to produce effectively what it was intended to produce. I followed all of the instructions to the letter, but I still was not successful. On the other hand, my brother never uses instructions, and his plants grow to be so beautiful. What is the difference? The difference is who nurtures the seed. I forgot to tell you that my brother owns a landscaping company. Nurturing plants is what he does for a living. It is not what I do for a living. I finally got tired of wasting good seeds, so I turned the nurturing over to the professionals. I asked my brother what it takes to produce such beautiful plants. He simply said, " You have to value it enough to do the following things..."

* Find the most productive place to plant it.
* Prepare the soil to receive the seed.
* Monitor its progress more frequently when first planted.
* Provide the proper nurturing for growth.
* Be patient with the seed.
* Be willing to change the environment if necessary.

As I spoke with him, I quickly realized that what he was telling me was not only good advice for growing productive plants, but would also work with growing people. If leaders would follow this formula for growing people, they would get the best out of the people that they are leading. Each key element in this formula contributes to the success of the life of the plant. No one element is more important than the other because not doing one of them can hinder the growth of the plant.

*Find The Most Productive Place to Plant The Seed*

In my conversation with my brother, he expressed the importance of finding the most productive place to plant the seed. He explained that it is a two part process. One is getting to know the seed. This is done by asking the following questions: where is it from, what can it tolerate, what can or cannot be in its surroundings?

This is critical knowledge to have in order to increase the chances of success for the seed. Not knowing this information could cause the planter to make unintended mistakes to the planting process. This is also important to the growing process of followers. Not knowing the background of followers can hinder their growth as well as the growth of the organization. How often do we learn when it is too late that we did not know enough about someone’s background before we placed them on a particular assignment? The second part of the process is researching the environment. This is done by asking the following questions: has it been productive with this type of seed, has it been well maintained, how much work does it need to be ready for the seed, is it adaptable?

I could write an entire chapter on the importance of researching the environment that we place followers in. Some leaders may have been productive with a certain type of follower, but their style will not be productive with others. Additionally, we should be careful not to place a new and fresh team member that is full of potential with a person that has not maintained themselves. They have not done anything to grow themselves. They have done the same thing, the same way year after year. They already have weeds growing around them. Why place the seed in an area that you can already see that it will have to fight for resources? The final two questions are questions that involves how much time and effort will it take of the leader. How much work will it take to get the environment ready for the soil? And is the environment adaptable? Both will cost the leader their most precious resource, time. Honestly, the latter question should be answered first. If the environment is not adaptable, don’t waste your time getting it ready.

*Prepare The Soil To Receive The Seed*

Once the location has been determined, the hard work of preparing the soil to receive the seed begins. The cultivating of the soil has to be done. This is the process of breaking up crusty soil which will allow for much easier penetration of essential elements deep into the soil where the plant’s roots can gain access to them. In organizations we have individuals or teams that are in need of cultivating before you can add a new seed to their environment. Years of compacted issues have caused them to not be receptive to any deep penetration of much needed professional or personal nutrients. A good lesson my brother told me was, “soil left alone does not produce”. Productive soil is periodically cultivated.

*Provide The Proper Nurturing for Growth*

Now that the soil has been prepared and the seed has been planted, it is time to provide the proper nurturing for growth. What do you mean? The seed is not ready to start a productive growth process? No. It must be provided with proper nurturing now. This is done by spending time with the seed, watering the seed, allowing sun to shine on the seed, and protecting the seed. How often do we invest so much in the preparation of adding a new team member, a new idea, or new project that once it is done we don’t have anything left to provide the proper nurturing for it to be success? We think that the preparation alone was enough to sustain it. If you don’t provide the nurturing then all of the preparation will have been a waste of your time. We are too quick to move on to the next thing before we ensure a sustainable growth process for each endeavor. We can’t treat the seed like a one night stand; we must do the things that a productive relationship requires.

*Monitor Its Progress*

In order to ensure that the seed is growing as it is intended to grow, the leader must spend time monitoring its progress during the beginning stages of growth. This requires the leader to make time for the seed, have realistic expectations, and be intentional. During a seed’s early stages it is most vulnerable to be damaged. This is the same case for those new in our organizations. Often times we give them appropriate onboarding processes for them to be successful in their roles. However, the leader must make sure that the new person is integrating appropriately into the organizations. The new person has many questions that will impact their level of success in their role that has nothing to do with their ability to do the job. For example, what is the culture of the organizations? Most of the time what is written in the mission statement is very different than what is actually being done on a day to day basis. As a leader it is important to spend time with them in the early stages to learn those nuances and avoid problems in the long run. Additionally, the leader must have a realistic expectation of the pace by which the person is growing within the organization. Moving them too quickly through the organization can hinder their growth. Sometimes leaders promote some employees too quickly, and they have not learned what they need in the original role. Leaders must remember that even a good thing could be ruined if the timing is not right.

*Change The Soil*

The most courageous yet challenging thing to do when you are valuing the seed is to change the soil. Sometimes seeds are planted in bad soil. No matter how well you prepared the soil to receive the seed it is just bad soil. Nothing will be productive in that soil. As a leader it takes courage to look at the soil that is around an unproductive seed, and make the call that the soil must be changed. In doing so the leader understands that the soil will not acknowledge itself as being bad. It will blame the seed for not producing. We see this often in the education field when teachers blame students for not being successful. Ironically, the student is successful in every other teacher’s classroom but this particular teacher. Principals have to make the hard decision of moving the teacher. This takes courage because the leader understands that he/she may have to get dirty to change the soil. Also, they are subject to being hurt in the process. People can be really hurtful when they are trying to maintain their identity and livelihood. They will blame everyone else, and say hurtful things to the leader that must make the change. Nevertheless, the leader must value the seed too much to allow it to remain in bad soil.

*Conclusion*

Nurturing followers may be summed up in two words. Protection and value. These two things are so important to the nurturing process of growing followers. There will come a time when every leader will be called upon to protect their followers. This will take courage to stand up for them because it will cost the leader something. Valuing the followers is as important if not more important than protecting them. The leader must value the follower enough to see the need to protect them. Both of these aspects of nurturing followers in my opinion are the most important things that a leader must do.

**4**

# **Providing Hope**

***The Gift That Keeps On Giving***

Farmers are the most optimistic people in the world. I cannot think of another profession where one starts out with nothing, has so much back-breaking work to do before seeds can even be planted, is required to perform daily maintenance, and that yields meaningful results at a snail’s pace. And yet they continue to farm. Day after day, it is the same old thing. Weeding, watering, and waiting. Weeding, watering, and waiting. More weeding, more watering and more waiting. What would cause a person to join this profession? Why would anybody sign up for this kind of work? What could possibly sustain them over the long haul? I believe the answer can be summed up in one word—hope.

Everyone needs hope, but what is it? The Scriptures define it this way: *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see*. (Hebrews 11:1, NIV). Hope encompasses everything we would like to see happen, or can even imagine in our wildest dreams. Farmers look at seeds and see potential. They see possibilities. They see a future that most people cannot see. They have complete confidence that their hope—that the seeds will grow and produce more of its kind— will one day become reality. They have complete assurance that, though there may be a time when the seeds cannot be seen, with the proper care and attention the day will come when little buds start to appear through the soil. Believing in something you cannot see requires hope.

*The Perspective of Hope*

Great school leaders are merchants of hope. They understand the tremendous trickle-down effect that hope can have when it is shared. They understand that hope provides a different perspective of a bad situation. Today’s educational landscape is paved with obstacles like never before. The teacher shortage that experts have been predicting for years has shown up with a vengeance. Teachers are leaving the profession in droves due to poor working conditions, low salaries, an exponential escalation of violent student behaviors, unreasonable expectations from parents, feeling isolated and forgotten on the job, and unhealthy stress levels. Despite all of these things, many teachers continue to stay in the profession. Why? Hope! Hope provides a different perspective of what they are currently seeing. They believe that things can and will get better! They still believe in the transformational power that an education can provide to a child. But even these champions for children get tired. Sometimes continuing to believe in goals that seem so far away requires hope from someone else. That is where leaders need to step in and step up!

Do you know the story of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel? One day he was walking through a valley and he saw some dry old bones on the ground. A conversation between him and God ensued. “He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know."” (Ezekiel 37:3). What seemed like a loss cause suddenly took on new life! God knew the dry bones could (and would) live. He needed to know that Ezekiel knew it too. God breathed life into what seemed like a hopeless situation. He kept Ezekiel focused on what was possible. As a leader, you will encounter a lot of “dry bones” in your career. Many of these bones need to find new life, while others need to be left for what they are—dead. What is your main focus as a leader? Are you keeping others focused on what is possible? Are you giving them hope that all is not lost? Like God did with Ezekiel, are you asking the hard questions? Are you willing to help resurrect the dry bones of unfinished initiatives and unrealized dreams?

Good farmers know their seeds better than anybody else. They’ve gotten their hands dirty enough times to know the capability of their seeds. Sometimes people can look at a farm and all they can see is dirt. Farmers see row after row of full-grown, healthy plants. It is no different in the educational arena. While all some can see is underperforming, difficult children and low test scores, great school leaders see caps, gowns, and graduation day for every child. All that some can see in children is what they currently are—economically disadvantaged, dirty, malnourished, traumatized. Great leaders see what they can become—independent, successful, healthy, and productive adults. As a leader, it is imperative that you keep hope alive in your organization! It is part of your job! Stop for a minute and evaluate your current effectiveness in the hope arena. How are you doing? When others are treading water and trying to stay afloat, do they see you as a lifeline or a boat anchor? The leader does not have to tell anyone when he/she has given up or lost hope. It is obvious. Always remember this: People without hope are game-players. Leaders who provide hope are game-changers. Which one are you?

Hope changes lives. Hope gives us strength. Hope gives us a reason to keep going. Most of us are familiar with the story of Joseph from the Bible. We have read about his dreams; we can picture his colorful coat. We know that the poor guy was sold into slavery by his own brothers. We also know that, in time, he became the second most powerful person in all of Egypt. But a lot happened in the thirteen years it took to go from prisoner to prince. He was treated poorly, he was ridiculed, he was accused of a crime that he did not commit, he was falsely imprisoned for years, and last but not least he was forgotten by those he had helped. He had every reason to give up. No one would have blamed him. So, what kept him going? I believe Joseph had a deathlike grip on hope! He refused to let go no matter how hard or unfair things seemed. He remembered the dreams from his youth and he still believed they would come true one day. Hope gave him the courage to face each day with dignity and a renewed sense of purpose.

*The Power of Hope*

A few years ago, I found myself in what seemed like a hopeless situation. My career had taken an unexpected and unwanted turn for the worse. I felt like my friends had abandoned me. I thought my family was disappointed in me and, for me, that was debilitating. Most of my former colleagues were nowhere to be found. After years of encouraging countless coworkers and holding the ladder so others could climb, I found myself alone. No friends. No encouragement. And a temporary job that was a major step backward in my estimation. I was a wounded leader. I was sinking and I knew it. I was in the middle of an ocean, the boat was taking on water, the sharks were circling, the theme from JAWS was blaring in my head, and nothing was on the horizon. And then hope showed up!

One of my duties as an Assistant Principal was morning car duty. It is not a job that most people want to do. It was a task that I thought I had left behind years ago. But there I was, opening car doors, welcoming students, and occasionally getting cussed out by parents who thought I closed their car doors too hard or had slighted them in some way. It was the last place I ever thought I would be at that point in my career. On one particularly cold, overcast morning, a white Avalanche pickup eased up to the curb. I opened the door and a young lady stepped out. Then I saw who the driver was—my boss—Dr. Rickie Harris. I closed his door—gently—very gently. Then I saw the passenger-side window ease down. Had I made him mad? I had never actually seen anyone’s eyebrows touch, but I had heard that he had the ability. We made eye contact. As far as I can remember, we had never had an actual conversation before. He asked me if I was still looking for another job. I told him that I was. His next words changed the trajectory of my life and career. He said that he needed to make some changes and that once he did, he wanted me on his team at central office. I was stunned! He wanted me on his team? Why? I was damaged goods. We barely knew each other. He went on to say that it might take some time to get things organized the way he wanted, but that the time was coming if I would wait. And then he drove off. I had to look down to make sure my feet were still on the ground! I hadn’t heard an affirming word from anyone at work in so long I was sure I’d misinterpreted what he’d said. He gave me hope that day! That tiny sliver of hope sustained me through another six months of car duty, lunch duty, dealing with student discipline issues, and a few teachers who thought I was too tough on my evaluations of their performance. When the days got hard and long, I remembered his words. And they came to pass! Hope was the oxygen I so desperately needed! As a leader, you have wounded people under your care too. As I stated earlier, great leaders often see potential where others do not. Dr. Harris saw something in me that I had given up on long ago. What do you see in the people on your team? Do you encourage them? When was the last time you praised their efforts in some way? As the leader, what you say and do matters more than you might think. Your words and actions can inspire and elevate or they can destroy and deflate.

*Hope without Hands*

We have all heard the old saying that talk is cheap. I believe that in most instances those words are true. If your words are just words, who benefits? As powerful as hope can be, it needs hands—your hands—in order to thrive. Hope without hands is merely a dream, a mirage. Hoping, wishing, and praying, can all be very powerful things when paired with doing. Farmers do not simply plant seeds, and then sit on the porch and hope that they will grow. Let me put it this way, if that is all they do they are going to be severely disappointed. Tilling hard ground is backbreaking work and, no matter our profession, we all have a lot of hard ground to till.

When I was growing up we almost always planted a garden. We had a small patch of ground between the backyard fence and the railroad tracks. Clearing the ground of grass and weeds was pretty easy. My dad also purchased a gas-powered tiller that was going to make the task a lot easier. I was excited the first time I used the tiller. I filled it with gas and pulled on the rope. It fired up! I released the clutch and the tines started turning. It was going to be an awesome day! When I started down the rows, I knew something was wrong. Instead of digging down into the soil, the tiller just bounced. I thought I had broken it already. My dad walked up and asked why I was not working. I explained what had happened. He smiled, cranked the tiller, and started tilling. At first, the tiller bounced as it had done for me. My dad’s feet never moved. He let it bounce. Within a few minutes, the ground started to crack. The tines started turning the loose dirt! Seconds later, it had dug down as far as we needed it to. Then it lunged forward and kept tilling. My dad motioned for me to take over. “Might take a while. Nobody said it was going to be easy,” was all he said. I learned a valuable lesson that day: Some breakthroughs take longer than others. You have got to have some grit if you are going to till hard ground.

For school leaders, our “hard ground” appears in the form of low expectations, teachers who are set in their ways, staff members who have emotionally retired but who keep showing up for their paycheck, declining budgets, and escalating safety issues. Leaders must understand that we cannot skip this vital step of tilling hard ground and expect great results. You cannot pretend that “hard ground” does not exist. Many leaders love to cover up things they do not like—things they do not want to deal with or want anyone else to see. It reminds me of times when, as a child, we were expecting company at our house. The whole family went crazy putting stuff wherever it would fit so that it could not be seen. Nine times out of ten, we crammed things in places where they did not belong. Here is what I learned from those experiences: You can try to keep up appearances but your closets will tell on you every time! Leading others is doing the work the right way! It might be unpleasant, and it might take longer than some people think it should. By leading the way, you are giving hands to your hope. Keep hope alive with your words and your actions!

If you are a leader, you have people on your staff whose emotional “closets” are full. Do you know who they are? When was the last time you encouraged them in some way? Today? Yesterday? Last week? Never? They need to see you! Visibility is so important in any workplace, especially for the leader. People need to know that you are available. They need to know you care. Your presence or lack thereof speaks volumes. Did you know that your presence provides hope? It does! When the Israelites reached the Red Sea, they realized they had a real problem. A large body of water was in front of them, and Pharaoh’s well-armed army was behind them. Moses could have taken an “every man for himself” approach given the dire circumstances they were facing. Instead, Moses prayed to God and then he took action. With his staff upraised, he stood where he could be seen. And then the waters began to part. The people were encouraged! The impossible became possible! Their hope was renewed by their leader standing firm and upfront during a crisis. (Exodus 14 NIV).

A few chapters later in Exodus 17, Moses and the Israelites went into battle with the Amalekites. As long as Moses’ hands were raised, the Israelites were winning the battle. When his hands grew tired and dropped, they started losing the fight. So, what was the solution? Other members of the team, Aaron and Joshua most notably, helped Moses hold up his arms. They even positioned a stone under his arms to help hold them up. They did whatever was necessary to secure the victory. As an educational leader, do you recognize how tired the arms of your staff have become? The pressure to perform on high-stakes tests keeps increasing. COVID-19 hammered everybody and moved the finish line so far back that some can no longer see it. School safety is a very real thing. Teachers are being armed in some districts. Did anybody ever think we would see the day when teachers would be carrying firearms to class? The teacher shortage is requiring everyone to do more with less. Their arms are tired! Are you willing to assist them by lending a helping hand? A kind, encouraging word from you carries more weight than you think. Our staffs need hope. Provide it! Our students need hope. Demand it! Our communities needs hope. Share it!

*Milestones*

Farmers understand milestones. When the ground is ready, it is a milestone. When the seeds are planted, it is a milestone. When the first buds appear above the ground, it is a milestone. When harvest-time comes, it is a milestone. Each milestone achieved represents progress toward the greater goal, and progress keeps hope alive. As a leader, does your work have identifiable milestones? Does your staff know where they are? Do you celebrate when milestones are reached? Most organizations have lofty goals and vision statements that cannot be achieved overnight. If they can be achieved overnight, you are probably aiming too low. Keep the desired outcome at the forefront. When any progress is made in the right direction, celebrate it! Nothing breeds success like success! It will keep hope alive and reenergize your staff.

*Snipers of Hope*

Snipers are sneaky. It is a part of who they are. It is in their DNA. In the military, snipers are highly-trained, highly skilled killers. It’s their job to take out the enemy. In combat, especially during times of war, some casualties are the result of friendly-fire. Friendly-fire occurs when soldiers die from wounds unintentionally inflicted by their own people. Unfortunately, there are educational snipers in every district and on every campus. They are killers too. They are out to kill hope, passion, energy, momentum, and perseverance. While friendly fire casualties are unintentional during times of war, they are almost always completely intentional at our workplaces. The snipers are everywhere. They don’t like anything! They don’t like anybody! They just want to get their check and be left alone for ten months. When something does not go their way, they start firing. Negative words, half-truths, gossip, emails, social media posts—they are well-armed and not afraid to pull the trigger. So, what do you do with these snipers? First, identify them. They are not hard to find. Second, disarm them. A weaponless sniper is just another face in the crowd. Never allow “target practice” to occur on your time and on your dime. Third, when the timing is right, remove them. If you allow them to stay on your team they will poison the water every chance they get. Your leadership will be compromised. Momentum will cease and hope will look like a piece of Swiss cheese. I have never seen a reformed sniper. They just do not go from singing “Welcome to the Jungle” to belting our “Kum bah Yah.” It’s not in them. Since they cannot be reformed, they must be removed! Trust is way too hard to build to give it up so easily. Remove the snipers! By doing so you will send a very clear message and you will keep hope alive for the real workers in your organization.

*Stories of Hope*

I love stories! Everything we experience, good or bad becomes part of our life’s story. Every decision we make or do not make becomes part of our life’s story. The pen is in your hand. So, what story do you want to tell? I believe that storytelling is an incredibly valuable, but dying part of who we are. Why? Because we have stopped telling our stories! Your story may be just what a person in crisis needs to hear. Always remember this: Sharing your story does not decrease hope, it multiplies it! Parts of our story are easy to tell. No one gets hurt. There is usually some humor thrown in for good measure. And everyone lives happily ever after. Few of us have difficulties sharing a great success story. But what about all of our other stories? The ones where there is not a happy ending and the victorious hero does not ride off into the sunset? Those stories are far more numerous but infinitely more painful to share. Why? Because hope is sometimes forged in the fires of heartache and disappointment. When we share our stories we become an open book and none of us enjoy being vulnerable. I suppose that is why the Scriptures are so important to me. They are filled with stories of imperfect people who made a lot of mistakes. David killed Goliath. He also had an affair with a married woman that resulted in a pregnancy. That child would later die. He conspired (successfully) to have Bathsheba’s husband killed. He was a blood-thirsty warrior. His lack of attention to his children led to embarrassing and sometimes deadly behavior. Adulterer. Murderer. Indifferent parent. David was all of these things. He was also a man after God’s own heart! (Acts 13:22). He was forgiven! God still had plans for him! Those stories about David’s indiscretions and series of bad decisions give me hope. Why? Because they remind me that I am not alone! I realize that I am not the only person to have ever felt defeated and tired. Others have walked the same road before me and they survived and thrived. Their stories remind me that God is still in control and He can take a bad situation and turn it into a great life lesson.

Your story can give people hope too! Maybe you are not one who typically shares a lot of your life’s personal details with others. Believe me, I understand that. I am not one of those people either. However, I do know that I have gone through some things for a reason—to learn from them. So, what should I do with the lessons I have learned? I have chosen to share my experiences with others, at least major parts of them anyway. If my experiences, as painful as some of them were, will help somebody through a hard time, hand me the microphone! If my struggles help others to realize that they are not alone, that others have walked that road before them and that they will survive the storm, great! If any part of my life gives any person even the smallest glimmer of hope, I am all for it! I refuse to let my 56 years (and counting) of life-lessons die with me because I did not want to share them. I will not be a hoarder of hope!

*Conclusion*

Hope can encourage people to keep going, to not give up. We live and serve at a time when the landmines are everywhere. Too many educators have grown weary and lost hope. As a leader, it is your responsibility to be a symbol of hope. Maintain clear expectations and be visible every day. Never water-down your expectations. Encourage every member on your team. They are probably going through things that you know nothing about. When you see somebody who is at the end of their rope, give them a reason to hang on. Times are hard for everybody right now. It is becoming much easier to give up than to keep pressing forward. Know your people. Value your people. Respect your people. Pray for your people. Thank God for your people. Show them what is possible. Be a merchant of hope!

**5**

# **Managing Crisis**

***A Leader’s True Character Is Shown, Not Heard During a Crisis***

There is an intentional reason why managing crisis is the last responsibility that is discussed in this book. That reason is because it will take all of the other responsibilities to be successful in managing crisis. Some more than others, but they will all play a role in managing a crisis successfully. How a leader manages crisis situations will define his legacy as a leader within the organizations. It can either build his influence within the organization or kill his influence. A great example of someone’s influence and career being enhanced by the way he managed a crisis is Rudy Giuliani. He was the Mayor of New York City during the horrific events of 9/11. The actions that he took to inform the people, nurture the people, and to rally the citizens of New York City along with the rest of the country enhanced his influence in the eyes of many. Not all leaders will have a crisis of that magnitude to manage, but you will have to manage a crisis.

Some crisis you will have time to prepare for. I had the wonderful privilege to serve as superintendent of schools in deep Southeast Texas. For eight months out of the year it was one of the nicest places to live as it pertains to weather conditions. The sun shined often, and it was rare for the temperature to drop below freezing. Unfortunately, during the months of July through November you had to be on the lookout for hurricanes. The blessing about hurricanes is that you have time to prepare for their arrival. There is a lot of uncertainty as to what the extent of damage will be in the aftermath, but you do have time to make preparations. My first experience in dealing with this type of crisis was with hurricane Harvey. In preparations for the storm, we had developed a hurricane preparedness plan. This plan was updated prior to hurricane season annually. Each department was responsible for ensure that all measures are taken to prepare to minimize the damage to the district, and to keep everyone safe.

Harvey was one of the most devastating hurricanes to strike the United States, let alone this area of Texas. It was an extensive rain event. The city of Orange received 63 inches of rain over a 3-day period! Many people woke up in the middle of the night welcomed by 4 to 5 feet of water in their homes. In the aftermath of the storm, the city looked like a war zone. There was not a street that you could go down without seeing families’ belongings on the side of the road. Educating students took a back seat in my leadership goals during this time. My main concern was to ensure that our students and their families had basic needs. One of the dilemmas that I had to face was whether or not to allow our school facilities to be used as shelters. Someone may say this is a no brainer. We should provide the people with a place to stay. I wish it was that easy. As a school leader, I had to consider the conditions of the district’s facilities. What damages were incurred by the district? Are the buildings safe enough to have anyone residing in them? Most importantly how quickly could I have them ready to receive students?

Being a shelter is wonderful to help the community. However, you become the bad guy when you have to put people out and they have nowhere to go in order for you to resume school. You must keep in mind that you have to look out for the safety of students and staff. There is no way you can do appropriate background checks for everyone that you are housing in the school as a shelter. So conducting school while also acting as a shelter was a risk that I was not willing to take. Communicating the districts position put responsible communication to the test. During a crisis the number one thing to do is communicate effectively. By doing so the information has to be frequent and accurate. Things are changing not only on a daily basis, but it is changing by the minute. To sum up leading in the time of crisis you must show compassion, direction, and composure.

*Compassion*

During a crisis there will always be someone that will experience pain. This pain can come in many fashions: emotional, financial, and physical. At this time the leader must go out his way to show compassion. My family was blessed to not have received any major loss during the three hurricanes struck my community. Additionally, I had two backup locations to reside. Unfortunately, that was not the case for the majority of the community that I served. Many had to sleep in shelters, and depend on the assistance of others for food and necessities. Leading with compassion moved me to go help members of my team get back to some sense of normalcy. My family and I assisted members of the community clean the damaged things out of their houses. Also, I began using my network of superintendents and church leaders to gather needed supplies and money for our community.

The greatest example of compassion was not shown by me during Hurricane Harvey. It was by my Director of Maintenance, Greg Willis. Greg’s home was significantly damaged during the storm. As a matter of fact, I can remember getting a call around 3:00 in the morning while the storm was pounding the city with rain. It was Greg asking if it would be ok for him and his family to go in the elementary school. The elementary was one of the campuses that was elevated enough to not take on flood waters, and it had a backup gas generator on it to supply minimal electricity. Please understand that Greg had every key and alarm code to any building in the district in his possession. The average person would have entered without permission in order to take care of his family. Being the respectful and man of integrity that he is, he felt it was only right to call me to ask for permission. Of course, I said yes. But this was not an act of compassion by him. I explain his situation to give you context for what he did.

In the aftermath of the storm, Greg and Dr. Guidry were the first people communicating with me about the condition of the district. Greg worked tirelessly to get the buildings ready for students to return. He often told me during this time that our number one priority was to get the students back to school. He worked 12 to 14 hour days to ensure that this happened. Each day not returning to his own home. He was living with someone else, and had done very little to get his home ready because of his compassion for the students of the district. During crisis, it’s not as much about what you say as it is about what you do. Someone told me once, “I can’t hear what you are saying because what you are doing is speaking so loudly.” A leader’s true character is shown, not heard during a crisis.

*Direction*

Being in a crisis is like being lost. Oftentimes, all a person is looking for is a sense of direction to lead them back to familiar territory. This a critical responsibility of a leader during a time of crisis. It is an incredible weight to carry also. Everyone in the organization is looking to you for direction. Many people will have suggestions, but the leader has the final decision. The leader can delegate the decision to someone else, but he can’t delegate the responsibility of the decision to anyone. The praise and problems of the direction will lie at the leader’s feet.

I have seen this incredible responsibility paralyze some leaders. They are so crippled by the crisis that they can’t make a decision. They are so afraid to make the wrong decision that they make no decision at all! They give their followers no direction. A leader cannot avoid the responsibility of giving direction. Even if it is the wrong direction, you must set some type of pathway to normalcy for the organization. When giving direction, the leader must master the unique quality of moving quickly but not in a rush. They must make quick in the moment decisions, but not rush through their thought processes in making them. This is difficult when everyone is wanting an answer. This can only be done by prioritizing decision during a crisis.

During a crisis it is not the big obvious decisions that are mishandled, it is the small underestimated decisions that are fumbled. It is great when you have a strong leadership team to assist with this process. Your team must know how much information you need to make the best decision on a particular issue. Remember, every decision that you are making is giving direction back to normalcy. For example, during the aftermath of hurricane Laura I was faced with the decision of how quickly to return our students back to campuses. We sustained damage to certain areas of our buildings, but we could still function within them in a normal situation hurricane recovery situation. However this was not normal because it was in the mist of worldwide pandemic. Normally, we would combine classrooms and increase the number of students in a class to manage while we repair the other area, but this was not a possibility in the mist of COVID. That direction could have created a “super spreader” situation of the virus. Then I thought, we can just go virtual. All of our students have devices that we have provided to them in preparation for the storm. Nope, that was not an option either because there was no power in the city. All of this information was being brought to me by my team to ensure that the direction that I would eventually give would be the best for the time. The final direction that was given was that everyone would stay home until we could fully function as a school without any compromises.

I had to communicate this direction day by day, and sometimes minute by minute. The key was showing that we had a pathway to normalcy. First, show that I am concerned about the students’ and staff’s overall well-being by providing any resources that the district could supply. Secondly, work with the contractors to ensure that the work done to the campuses would provide a safe learning environment. Third, communicate a realistic tentative return. Fourth, be aware of the timeline for the city to have power and internet restored. This would determine when I could start providing virtual instruction to students. Lastly, how many employees would be able to return? All of these factors contributed to the directions that I would give during this crisis. Sorting through information and prioritizing decisions allowed me to give directions to the organization in an intentional manner quickly but not rushed.

*Composure*

The art of making it look easy is an art that high quality leaders have. It is quite amusing to me when people tell me that I make this look easy. I have been told, “Dr. Harris you act as though this does not bother you or you expected this.” What they don’t understand is that I may be crying on the inside, and that I have no clue what my next move is. The leader has to keep his composure during a crisis; The rest of the organization will feed on your mood. If the leader is frantic, the organization will be frantic. A leader can keep their composure when they have a team that they can trust, a network of knowledge to tap into, and divine guidance.

A leader can relax in any situation when they have a great team that they can trust. When a leader can trust their team to do their responsibilities understanding the urgency of the matter in an effective way, they can be composed in any situation. A good example of this is watching the great coaches coach their teams when the game is on the line. The crowds are yelling, the broadcasters are animated, and everyone is losing their minds! The great coaches are composed. They have prepared their teams for this moment, and they trust them to do what they have been trained to do in this moment. This is the same for a leader of an organization. When you have trained your team to be great in their roles, you can be confident that they will perform under pressure.

Let me say this. It is the responsibility of the leader to ensure that the team is ready for moments of crisis. During crisis times, I tell my team to trust their training. I can do that because I know that they have been trained well. Now it is not my job to provide all of the training, but it is my job to provide the space and opportunities for the training. A great teammate will take advantage of the space and opportunities that are given. If you have a teammate that will not, they must be removed from the team before the crisis. They will let you down in the midst of the crisis because they can’t trust what they don’t have.

Having a network of knowledge to tap into allows a leader to be composed in a crisis. Realizing that he does not have to have all of the answers. Having a network of individuals that are not in the organization to bounce ideas off of is great. When you are in the crisis you can’t always see your blind spots. It is good to have someone you can trust to give you good quality advice. This goes back to chapter one, leaving a trail. Having a network of individuals that will use their experiences to shine light on your situation is so important.

Many may not need divine guidance to remain composed in a crisis, but I do. I need the guidance of an all mighty God to help me keep my head in a bad situation. As a leader, I can remain composed when I trust that my divine guide will not let me down. I realize that I am not doing this alone, nor have I ever been alone. I trust in what he says, what he is doing, and what he has already done in my life. So I don’t lose my composure in a crisis because ultimately I know who is in control, and it is not me. Honestly speaking, it is my divine guide that gives me a heart of compassion, directions, and composure in the mist of any crisis.

# **Notes**

**Chapter 1**

1. John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 11.
2. Adrian B. Johnson, Reality Leadership: Real Leadership Examples To Inspire Aspiring Leaders (Executive Leadership Services, 2020), 7.

**Chapter 4**

1. Hebrews 11:1
2. Ezekiel 37:1
3. Exodus 14:1