

Today we're wrapping up our four part series entitled Leading Through, and the subtitle is Three Essentials, Three Essentials for Navigating Uncertainty. As you are painfully aware, and actually don't need to be reminded of, this season has been challenging for all of us. It's been brutal for some of us financially, socially, relationally to consequently we're all picking up the pieces and we're moving forward the best we can. But, many of us are actually not simply navigating ourselves through this difficult time, we're responsible for helping other folks move forward as well, right? Family members, employees, team members, students, perhaps your entire community.

So if you're a parent, a manager, an executive of any type, a teacher, a city or state official, people are looking to you and they're looking to me for direction, for inspiration and ultimately for hope. And you know this, while leading under normal circumstances is tough enough, I mean, leading people through what we're experiencing right now, well, as my friend, Charlie Renfroe is fond of saying, "This is not a casual endeavor". And, be honest, nobody prepared us for this, right? I mean, how do you prepare for a pandemic combined with an economic shutdown, that's left us teetering on economic meltdown while navigating social unrest during an election year.

I don't know about you, but this is my first time. And I can't focus on simply getting me through this because I'm responsible for getting the me's around me through this as well. I'm responsible for leading my family through this, our 500+ staff members through this. And I feel responsible to some extent for leading many of you through this as well, and perhaps you can relate. There aren't any maps, there aren't any instructions, we're making this up as we go along, and this is the tension that every single leader lives with. Every father who's lost his job, every mother who finds herself parenting alone, every small business owner trying to stay afloat, every manager, and maybe this is you who senses all eyes on him or her when she walks through the door or when she logs on to Zoom.

We don't have all the answers, we don't always know what to do. And while much of this feels new, there's something that's actually not so new about it. And that's uncertainty, because uncertainty is a permanent part of life, and to the point of our series, uncertainty, uncertainty is why the world needs leaders, and it's why the world needs leadership. It's why your family, it's why your company, it's why your city, it's why your state needs you.

So we're discussing three essentials for leading through disruption and uncertainty. And while these facets of leadership are always important in times like these, they are more important than ever. So if you haven't been with us, a quick review, [the first of our three, was moral authority](#), to lead through times of disruption and uncertainty we have to maintain our moral authority. There must be alignment between what we say and what we do. What we expect of others and what we expect of ourselves. Moral authority is the credibility we earn by walking our talk and moral authority creates credibility and credibility creates influence, and come on in because of uncertainty influence is everything.

The second non-negotiable [we talked about last time, is clarity](#). Clarity, you can be uncertain, but as a leader, you cannot afford to be unclear. In fact, our mandate as leaders and as parents is to be clear even when we're not certain, and here's why I say that. Clarity is actually perceived and experienced as leadership. In times of disruption, clarity is the next best thing to certainty. So mom, dad manager, mayor, teacher be clear even when you're not certain, which is pretty much most of the time, right?

And that brings us to our third non-negotiable for leading through difficult times, you must display your humanity. You must display your humanity. You have to be human. We have to be vulnerable. We have to be transparent. We have to be real, exercise our empathy muscle, the people who are looking to you need to experience your humanity. And here's why. When

I'm convinced that you know how I feel, I will be far more open to your influence. When I'm convinced that you know how I feel, I'm gonna be far more open to your influence, even when, in fact, especially when, you're asking me to follow you into the unknown.

I mean, when you acknowledge and legitimize my fear or my worry, my concern, I'll trust you, but if you ignore it, if you downplay it, if you brush it off, if you criticize me for it, if you seem to be unaware of how current reality is impacting me and impacting my family, I'm gonna resist you and I'll resist you because, well, you've convinced me that you don't understand me. And while that may not even actually be the case, I mean, you may be as worried as I am, you may be as uncertain as I am, but for me to follow you, for me to follow you, you've got to convince me that you get me.

Now, recently, I had the opportunity to interview author and consultant Patrick Lencioni on my leadership podcast, and I asked him, I said, "Patrick, what are you telling leaders right now"? He consults with business and community leaders. And I said, "Hey, during all this stuff that's going on, what are you saying"? And here's what he said, he said, "I'm telling leaders to be human". "I'm telling leaders to be human, to check in often. Come on, no one has ever left a company because the leader over communicated or communicated too often".

But to be clear, I'm talking about expressing your humanity within the context of your role as a leader. This isn't just empathy for empathy sake. This isn't, I know you're worried, I'm worried too, so let's just all be worried together. That's a version of empathy, but that's not leadership and it's not what your family and the folks who are depending on you need right now. Empathy within the context of leadership is for the purpose of building trust so that the people who depend on you will trust you enough to follow you.

Now, there's actually a biblical term for this that I think encapsulates this idea perfectly. It could really, it captures this dynamic. It may make you a bit nervous, but it shouldn't, and it's the term pastor, pastor, and for most of us, the term pastor carries religious connotations, but technically it shouldn't. It comes from the Latin term for shepherd. In fact, interesting fact, the term pastor should have never appeared in our English New Testament because it's not a translation of the Greek text. Early Bible translators actually substituted the Latin term pastor for the Greek term shepherd. And why did they do that? Well, that's a story for another day. But originally like back in Jesus' day, originally, pastoring or literally shepherding was a function, not a church office, it certainly wasn't a position.

Now, the important thing for our discussion is that during times of disruption, uncertainty and uncertainty, our families, our communities, and our employees need to be pastored or shepherded. Not because they're sheep, because they're looking to you and they're looking to me for, well, they're looking to us for what sheep looked to their shepherds for, protection, security, and reassurance. So, if you lead in any capacity, in any capacity, shepherding is part of your responsibility.

And if you're thinking, "Well, Andy, that's easy for you to say because you're a professional shepherd". It's not as easy for me to say, as you might imagine. I'm a pastor by profession, but the pastoring aspects of my leadership does not come natural to me. I had to learn, and honestly, I'm still learning. I'm a much better public speaker than I am a shepherd. And I'm not proud of that, in fact, the only reason I tell you that is to encourage those of you who are already playing with your phone, because you're thinking, there's no way I'm doing this too touchy, feely for me, right? I get that. And this may not be the way you're wired, but this is still your responsibility at home, at work, at school and in your community. And maybe this will encourage you.

Years ago of our board members was rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery, and when I found out, I drove over to the hospital to check on him. Back then, I didn't, in fact, I still don't do

much hospital visitation for two reasons, I'm terrible at it, and consequently, I'm uncomfortable with it, and I make people uncomfortable, which is the last thing you wanna do when people are already uncomfortable, right? Anyway, so when I walked into Ray's hospital room, his eyes got big and before he could stop himself, he blurted out, "Andy, what are you doing here"? And I said, "Ray, I just came to check on you". And he said, and I quote, "Oh, when I saw you, I thought it must be worse than they told me". I'm such a comforting presence.

So, for some of you, what I'm about to suggest will not be natural, but that doesn't mean you don't care about people, you do, you just care differently. But, and this is so important, in times of disruption, in times of uncertainty, we have to disrupt our own patterns and resist, in some cases, our personalities and our temperaments, in times of uncertainty, we have to step into the role of pastor and shepherd, because along with clarity and moral authority, that's what people need. It's not necessarily what they need most, but, and this is so important, it's not necessarily what they need most, but it is what they need first.

So don't hide behind what's comfortable. Don't barricade yourself behind busy-ness or a role or a title, great leaders do what needs to be done, and in times of disruption, people need shepherding. They need pastoring. They need reassuring. So whether it's comfortable or not, it's time to turn it up in the mix. And here's the thing. In fact, I'll make you a promise, if you do this, even if you do it poorly, even if you do it awkwardly, the people you're responsible for will be so grateful. They will appreciate the fact that you are stepping outside of your comfort zone for their sake, that you're putting them first.

And according to Jesus, that's what great leaders do. That's what he did. He put other people first. After a particularly stressful season of literally hands on ministry, Jesus and his 12 apostles decided to get out of town for a break. In fact, Peter, by way of Mark tells us what took place. Here's what Peter told Mark. He said, "So they", talking about the 12 apostles and Jesus, "So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place". So they decided we just need to get away from the crowd and take a break because they've been so busy.

The story continues, but many who saw them leaving on the boat, recognized them, there's Jesus, there's Jesus, and they ran on foot around the edge of the Lake from all the towns, and they got to where Jesus was going ahead of Jesus. And then something interesting happens. When Jesus and his apostles landed and saw the large crowd, he got back on the boat and went to an even more solitary place. No, that's not what he did. And when Jesus saw the large crowd, this is so powerful, even though he was worn out, even though he was tired, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and so he began teaching them many things.

everybody missed dinner, and so then he did what good shepherds do, he fed them, all 5,000 plus of the crowd. Later on John, the apostle John would record Jesus' description of his role as a shepherd, and this is so instructive, and this is so inspiring for all of us, in fact, for those of us who are responsible for members of our family or a company, or a community here is the posture, here's the posture we are to take as leaders who are stepping into the role of shepherd.

Here's what Jesus says, speaking of the role of shepherd, he says, "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out". This is what the good shepherd does. "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them. He goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice".

Now what I'm about to say next is so extraordinarily important. During times of uncertainty, and during times of disruption, your voice, your voice is more important than your words. During times of uncertainty and disruption, when it comes to the people looking to you for hope and reassurance, your voice is more important than your words. Your voice is an

expression of your humanity. People need to hear your voice. It's not enough for them to read your words, email and texts, those are for normal times, but during times of disruption and uncertainty find ways for people to hear your voice.

When you're tempted to text, call, I mean, they probably won't answer anyway, right? Nobody answers anymore, but leave a voicemail. Let people hear your voice, because your voice conveys your humanity, your empathy, your genuine interest, and call somebody even if you can't call everybody, this is symbolic leadership. It goes back to what you've heard me say before. Always look for an opportunity to do for one what you wish you could do for everyone. Your team or your staff may be too large for you to call everyone, but call someone and check in. Especially those who are having a particularly difficult time in this season.

And please ignore that little voice in your head, ignore that little voice in your head that says, "Well, since I can't do it for everyone, I shouldn't do it for anyone". That's nonsense. Don't try to be fair, be engaged, especially now. And again, this doesn't come naturally for me, not because I don't care, but because I forget how important this is.

When I first heard that my friends Stuart Hall had been rushed to the hospital with complications from COVID, I came home that afternoon and I told Sandra, and I was telling her all about the things that were going on, and Sandra asked me, she said, "Well, have you called Kelly? His wife, Kelly, have you called Kelly?" I said, no, I'll text her later. And she smiles, she reached over, literally took my phone, slid it across the counter, and she looked at me and she said, "I think we should call her now". She was right. And so I called, and I didn't know what to say. I mean, at times there's nothing to say. It's why we don't call, isn't it? But that's a mistake.

Call somebody even if you can't call everybody. Again, this is our responsibility as leaders. But if you're a Jesus follower, it goes beyond that. If you're a Jesus follower, this goes beyond just good leadership etiquette. Jesus said this, he said, this is so powerful, he said, "I am the good shepherd". "I am the good shepherd". And when we read something like that, especially if you're a Jesus follower, you feel like it just puts them in a category of one, but that's not his point. He said, "I am the good shepherd". Which means, if we are Jesus followers, and if Jesus was willing to step into the role as shepherd, think about that, if Jesus was willing to step into that role, as his followers, we have no choice but to follow.

But what he says next may cause your heart skip a beat. He says this, "I am the good shepherd". And oh, by the way, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep". To which, we think, I'm not sure I wanna be that good, right? Fortunately, this is not literal for most of us, but there is certainly application. And here's why I say that. The good shepherd puts the sheep first and the sheep know it. And the good shepherd steps out of his or her comfort zone to make sure the sheep feel comforted.

So, don't just be father, be dad. Don't just be mother, be mom. Don't just be boss, manager, supervisor, be human. Or to use Jesus' words, don't be like a hired hand, don't be like someone who's there because they have to be, they're there because they're paid to be, because they're supposed to be, the hired hand isn't in it for the sheep, the hired hand is in it, well actually Jesus says it best, here's what he said, he said, "The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep".

So what happens, "When he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and he runs away". Why? Jesus tells us. "The man runs away, because he's a hired hand and he cares nothing for the sheep". He's not in it for the sake of the sheep. So he doesn't stick around when things are uncomfortable. During times of uncertainty and disruption, when the wolves are howling, your presence, your willingness to stick around, your willingness to keep showing up is more important

than ever.

Your presence, your presence is more important than your presentation. Your presence is more important than your preparation, where I struggle with this as a leader, and sometimes even as a father, is I feel like there's no reason to show up until I have something new to say, right? Until I have something helpful to say, insightful to say, until I have something specific to offer, until I have answers and solutions. That's a mistake. In times of uncertainty, our presence, our presence is everything. And this is difficult for some of us, because we're solution people, right? We're progress oriented. So, why pull people together if we don't have solutions and answers? Because in times of disruption, there is something more important, namely our presence.

Now, this next little illustration may be a bit close to home, so I just wanna warn you ahead of time. But have you ever sat in a waiting room, waiting for information from a doctor or a surgeon? Let me ask you this, if you've ever been in that situation, can they show up or check in too often? Can they show up or check into frequently? I mean, can they be too present? No. Because when the doctor or the surgeon walks in, what do we do? We lean in, why? Because we crave reassurance. We crave their presence. We don't want a text, and we don't want a phone call, we want a person and in a hospital waiting room, come on, we could care less about the quality of the doctor's presentation, right? We don't roll our eyes if his grammar isn't perfect or she mispronounces a name.

So as a father, as a husband, as a leader, as a boss, here's the question, here's the question that I'm responsible for asking myself every single day, and if you have people looking to you for direction, reassurance and hope, it's a question you should ask yourself every day as well. And here it is, do people know, do people know, do people know that I care? Do the people you are responsible for, do they know that you care? You know you care, but do they know? Or to ask it in a different way, is your humanity showing? Is your humanity showing?

To wrap up, I wanna tell you a story, it involves president Obama, and if you're a Democrat, you're gonna love this. If you are a Republican, you should love this, not because you necessarily loved him, but because you're mature enough to learn from anybody and everybody, right? So for four minutes, just four minutes, I want you to set aside your political filter because this incident from his presidency punctuates the importance of taking on the mantle of shepherd and pastor in times of disruption, uncertainty, and in this instance, in times of unspeakable tragedy.

If you have ever visited a friend or family member who has lost a child, you know that it's one of the most difficult environments to walk into. As a pastor, I have found myself in this place over and over and over, and there's just nothing to say. And this is especially difficult if someone has lost a child unexpectedly. There just are no words. There are no solutions. But imagine having to walk into that set of circumstances or that environment 20 times to comfort 20 families on the same afternoon. This is the situation president Obama found himself walking into by choice following the Sandy Hook elementary school shootings in 2012 in Newtown, Connecticut.

On the morning of December 14th, you'll probably remember this, a 20 year old broke into the school, right after the doors had been locked. He shot and killed 26 people, including 20 children before taking his own life. The oldest child was seven years old. Michelle Obama in her memoirs said this, she said it was the darkest day in the White House. She wrote, "When I walked in, when I walked into the oval office, Barack and I embraced silently. There was nothing to say. No words". As a fact guy, that's how she describes him, as a fact guy she said that president Obama demanded to be fully briefed. He wanted all the details.

Joshua Dubois, who was the spiritual advisor to the president in his book, "The President's Devotional" describes the Saturday afternoon, that the president called him and said he wanted to

meet with each of the families of the victims and he wanted Joshua to go with him. Joshua describes what happened when they arrived. This is from his book. He said, "We prepared seven or eight classrooms for the families of the slain children and teachers, two or three families to a classroom. The president took a deep breath, steeled himself and went into the first classroom. And what happened next"? He says, "I'll never forget" "Person after person received an engulfing hug from our commander-in-chief".

He would say, "Tell me, tell me about your son. Tell me about your daughter, and then he would hold pictures of the loss beloved as their parents described their favorite foods, their favorite television shows and the sounds of their laughter. For the younger siblings of those who had passed away, many of them two or three, four years old, way too young to understand, he said that the president would grab them, toss them into the air, laughing, and then hand them a box of White House M&Ms".

Joshua says this, "In each room, I saw his eyes water, but he did not break. And then the entire scene would repeat itself for hours over and over again through well over a hundred relatives of the fallen. Each one equally broken. Each one equally wrecked by the loss". Joshua says that he and the president flew home in silence, and that president Obama never spoke of these sacred moments in public. In fact, this is probably the first time you've heard about this.

Now, here's why I tell you that story. It takes away our excuses, because that day president Obama was the pastor in chief, the shepherd in chief, not because he claimed that title, it's not a title, because he acted, because he led in that capacity. He showed his humanity. He took off the mantle of authority and he set it aside, because that's what the moment called for. Think about it, he could've gotten away with a handwritten note. He could have gotten away with just a call. He could have met with all the families at one time, and express his condolences and then flown home. But he didn't, he waited in because that's what the moment called for.

The point being this, there's a time for us non-huggers, to hug, for us order givers, to listen for the fact people to stop and just feel, for us progress people to pause and just be in the moment. For fathers to be dad, and for mothers to be mom. And times of disruption and uncertainty, words are important, but words are not enough. Lead with your humanity, your presence, your compassion, your empathy. Assure the people who are looking to you that you care, make sure your humanity is showing.

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