

THE ABCD'S OF CRISIS LEADERSHIP

BY BISHOP GRANT HAGIYA

With the COVID-19 crisis comes a real test of our leadership. When a crisis hits us, we must assume the mantle of leadership. As the late Peter Drucker used to say, "When the seas are calm anyone can drive the boat, but when the storm appears, I want the captain at the helm." This is exactly that time for both lay and clergy leadership.

Let me use the ABC method and add an additional "D," to the mix:

- **A is for what is ABSOLUTELY essential:** To center ourselves in God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. This crisis is a time for us to ground ourselves in God and seek the will of God in our spiritual exercises.
 - Pray, fast and read the scriptures: Take the intentional time to commune with God. The old adage applies here, "Spend one hour in prayer per day, except when you do not have that amount time, then spend two hours in prayer per day." This is not the time for us to speak first, but a time for us to listen and discern the will of God, and then act. As spiritual leaders, we have the advantage of having an Absolute Reality that transcends our human frailty. Let us lean on God in this moment of crisis.
- **B is for BE the Non-Anxious Presence:** Do this for yourself and those whom you lead. Being non-anxious means we model a steady, wise and consistent state of being. We don't overreact or allow our emotions to overtake us.
 - Ed Friedman describes it this way, "Self-differentiation is the capacity of the leader to discern her or his clear position, to be able to state this clearly and to stay in touch with others in the system (not withdraw)."
 - It means being the mature adult in any situation and taking the responsibility to care for others, especially the weakest among us. It is to know clearly where we begin and where others begin, and not be fused with them. A self-differentiated leader lowers the anxiety of the group and enables less random reactions and more creative solutions.
- **C is for COLLABORATE:** Gone are the days of the solo hero leader. We cannot lead alone, and as seductive as it is to want to command and direct during a crisis, this is the time we must work with and empower others. No one person can get us through a crisis, and the sooner we realize this the sooner we mobilize others and even the whole community towards positive actions.
 - Collaboration enables more creative and innovative solutions to arise. Creativity feeds upon an open source of different perspectives and points of view. With more people involved, innovations will blossom, but they will also be tested and sharpened through a collaborative effort. Never go it alone in a crisis, either personal or organizationally. We need each other!

- **D is for Doing:** In the end, we must act. All of the other suggestions above are preludes to what people are looking for—inspiration, hope, courage and actions. There is a place for discernment, contemplation and being before we act, but we do have to act.
 - To be more specific, act on vulnerabilities of your church or organization. What weaknesses do we need to address now in order to survive? In terms of our churches and the COVID-19 crisis, do we have the financial reserves to keep going and for how long? If the answer is “no,” we need to act now to ensure our sustainability. Online giving, a web-based fundraiser or a stewardship appeal all need to be considered.
 - The other action step is to capitalize on opportunities and innovations. We all have to find new ways of doing church as we face the realities of social isolation. How can we care for our seniors and people in need? How can we continue our feeding programs and help to the homeless? What creative ways can we carry out the ministry of Jesus Christ to those who need it the most?

One final thought, and it does not follow from any letter from the alphabet, and that is be kind and take care of yourself. As leaders we will be running around madly taking care of everyone we can. Everyone will need something from us. We will be meeting the needs of everyone except ourselves. We can sustain this over short bursts of time and energy, but not over a prolonged period. We will not be able to help others if we drive ourselves into a state of sickness or exhaustion. Be kind to yourself by forgiving yourself when you make mistakes, as we will all make mistakes in a crisis! Take the time for self-care and care of your families. They need you just as much as everyone else does. Pace yourself. Commune with God in prayer. Eat healthy. Get adequate sleep. Exercise regularly. We may be in this crisis for a prolonged period. We need the best “you” possible.

We face a crisis that no one anticipated in COVID-19 and the consequences are deadly real. However, we will get through this with God’s lead. People are counting on you. Thank you to those who have risen to the occasion already and provided creative, grace-filled care. I know in the coming days and months you will continue to rise to the occasion.

Be the hope,

Bishop Grant Hagiya