

THE LEADING EDGE

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Pentecostal Leadership

Shaping servant leaders to change the world in the power of the Spirit

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AFTERMATH: A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

My heart is so heavy in the aftermath of yesterday's tragedy that I have questioned the wisdom of even sending out a newsletter this month. Does anyone really need another piece of email when so many innocent people have had their lives stolen from them?

I have decided to write simply to let you know that we are with you in this thing.

I knew no one in New York or Washington, D.C. yet somehow there is now a bond among us all--the living and the dead. Perhaps I should have felt this sooner. This terrible shock has made me realize how isolated and self-absorbed I can become.

It has also made me realize that people and organizations can both go into denial. Sometimes this can be a very useful shock absorber. In general, however, leaders cannot go forward as if nothing has happened. Because it *has* happened.

Here are some things I'm seeing in my own life that I would like to pass along to you. There are no solutions in this kind of situation, but perhaps you can relate to a few of these thoughts:

1. I need to give myself permission to grieve: this is hard for me because I've been a leader for a long time. I'm used to people expecting me to be capable and "in charge." Weeping doesn't fit this image well. It's also really hard on my pride. Grieving is sometimes best done in private, but it needs to be done.

2. My organization needs to grieve too: the network of relationships that make up an organization are like its nervous system-it's where we feel the pain. Nothing seems quite right. I need to expect my organization to cycle through all 5 grief phases (denial, anger, depression, bargaining, acceptance) repeatedly for an extended period. Grief is not just an individual experience.

3. I need to expect some bumps in the road: feelings will run strong during this time. Ordinary meetings will turn angry. Pedestrian issues will seem supremely important. Matters of conscience will seem like matters of principle. I need to realize that all of us (including me) have lots of extra emotional energy in our systems right now, so I need to give and receive lots of extra grace.

4. I need to shut up: when others talk to me about their pain I sometimes feel my pastoral urges (16 years worth) rising to the surface in the form of counsel or advice. I must stifle this at all costs. There are two simple rules here: #1 don't say anything stupid. #2 everything I feel like saying is stupid. These friends need me to just listen.

5. I need to talk, too: going to a trusted friend to talk through how I'm feeling is really important. This does not come easy. I feel "weak" when I do this. But if this catastrophe doesn't make me weak, what will? The truth is that I need others all the time; I'm just admitting it now.

6. I need to expect some temporary performance declines: yesterday I could not remember the room number in which my wife's Systematic Theology class meets, despite the fact that I walk past it almost daily. The trauma just erased the information from my memory. Concentrating on work is also proving difficult. This offends my professional pride, but I have to admit it's there for a while. Somehow it's a relief to be able to say it.

7. I need to give everyone permission to grieve in their own way: I process stress by doing research, drinking coffee, and burying myself in work (inefficiently). Others work through their feelings in totally different ways. This has to be OK with all of us if we're going to help each other to through. My grief process is not the standard by which to judge others

8. I cannot forget how to laugh: this feels backwards, but I'm learning that being able to experience humor at appropriate times is a powerful healing medication. It makes me feel like the whole world did not end in New York. I need to find ways to help my organization hold on to its sense of humor too. We will need it.

9. I need to understand how fragile everything really is: working in a school in a small midwestern city can feel kind of "safe" in a lot of ways. However, a few years ago I was standing on the top floor of the World Trade center myself looking out over the city. If that day had been yesterday, I

would have gone from a tourist to a victim in just seconds. I've never felt more strongly how much I need God at the center of my life or how little anything else can be trusted.

10. I still have to lead: there is a difference between denial and playing with pain. The difference is courage. People around us still need to be served. Leaving a vacuum in our organizations does not serve them well. The best revenge when our way of life is threatened is to continue to live it. This means faithful leaders need to stay at their posts caring for God's people and for the world around them. This is a test. But we will pass it with God's help.

That's enough. Let's pray: "Jesus, we ask you to pour out comfort in our wounded land. Send healing like a river into the broken heart of every person touched by this tragedy. Let wisdom prevail. Let your church rise up as an agent of mercy until those around us see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. Empower the leaders of your church with grace to raise up an army of love and compassion. Let us be the children of light in a dark time. We pray in your name. Amen."

We're with you,

Earl

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