

GRACE

LEADING THROUGH

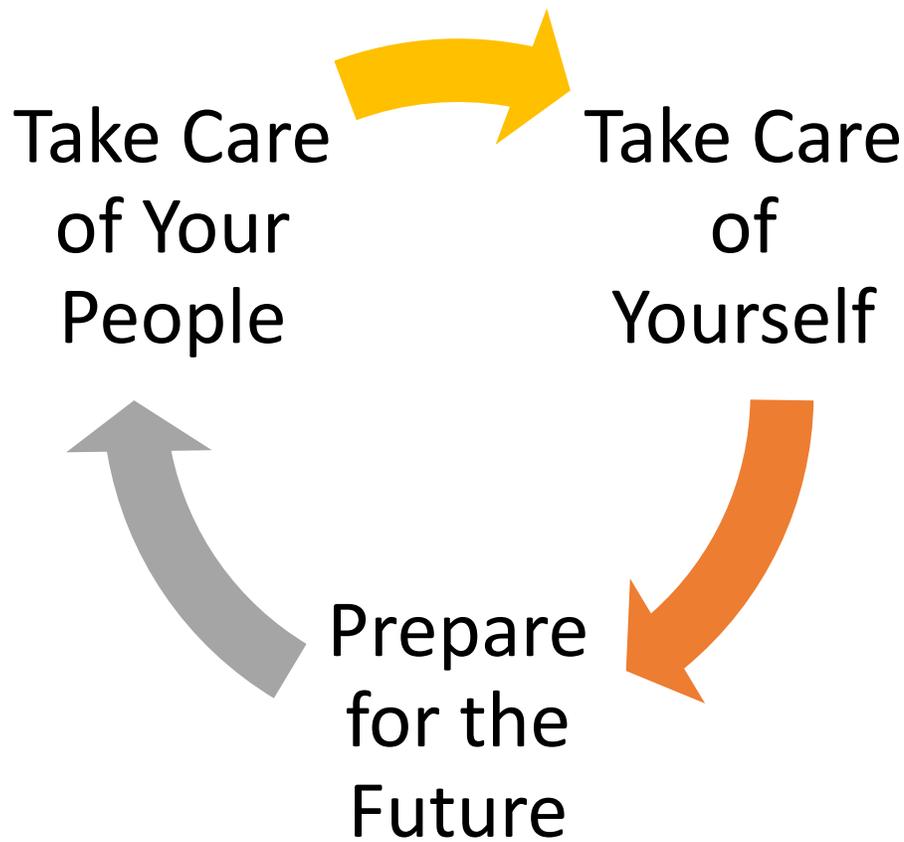
UNDER

CHANGE AND CRISIS

PRESSURE

JOHN BALDONI

Handbook
for
Grace under Pressure:
Leading Through Change & Crisis



The principles contained in this book provide insights for how to respond in times of flux. This handbook contains suggestions and tools you can implement now to make yourself more effective in times of change and crisis.



Take Care of Your People

What Is Our Situation?

Leaders need to be attuned to what is happening within their organization. They need to identify challenges as well as the opportunities. They must also gauge the mood and motives of their people. Taken as a whole we can call this “situation awareness.”

The following three questions will help a leader get feel for the situation and what his/her response to it can and should be. ¹

What is happening? Consider this question as a means of taking inventory of what people are doing and what effect they are having. Are things going well? If so why? If not, why not?

What is NOT happening? Answering this question requires careful thought. The leader must consider what is missing? That is not so easy to determine. It also requires an assessment of mood and commitment. Are people engaged in what they do? If so, why? If not, why not?

What can I do to influence the outcome? Knowing what is happening prompts the leader to take action. Very often that action will come through the efforts of others. That requires delegating authority and responsibility to others to effect change. Some occasions will call for the leader to do nothing, merely to observe and see how things unfold.

These questions can be asked in real time, as situations are unfolding. Or they can be used as a method of reflection, to gain perspective.

Asking the Right Leadership Questions

Most leaders like to share information with others. But very often they don't know how to share that information because some information they have is still unformed. That's where a good set of questions come in. When you ask the right question, you can distill answers that are relevant as well as helpful.

Very often it is necessary to narrow focus so you can elicit the right information. Before you begin an interview think of what you want to learn. Is it something specific, or is it a process? Is it a methodology or is it a story? Narrowing focus will enable the individual to provide the information you are seeking.

Here are some sample questions:

- *How do you communicate the mission?*
- *Tell me about a problem you solved?*
- *How did you enlist the support of others?*
- *How do you handle disagreements among staff?*
- *How do you encourage productivity?*
- *Tell me about a setback you encountered? What did you learn from this failure?*
- *Tell me about a challenge that you could not solve? What did you learn about yourself from this experience?*
- *What do you wish you had known when you assumed your first leadership role?*

The answers to each of these questions may be best told as a story. Encourage storytelling when appropriate.





Take Care of Yourself

Reducing Stress

Stress is the body's reaction to danger. For early man, danger might be anything from a predatory animal to a hostile enemy. For us, stress results from multiple sources – at work and at home. The challenge is to find ways to reduce stress and channel it into energy you can use to become more productive.

Step One:

Identify what is triggering stress. It may be an email from your boss or the sound of a colleague's voice. Whatever the trigger is, you must recognize it.

Step Two:

Deal with the trigger. Rather than react, teach yourself to “stay calm.” That is, take a deep breath and focus on breathing from the center of your diaphragm. Focus on your breath.

Step Three:

Remove yourself (temporarily) from what is stressing you. For example, wait a beat before opening the email. Take a deep breath then open and read slowly. Instead of responding immediately, take a moment to reflect on what you want to say. Then reply. You might also want to take a walk around the office, or pop outside for a moment to catch a breath of fresh air.

Step Four:

Return to work. Focus on what you can do now as well as later. Plan how you will continue working.

Step Five:

Repeat this cycle as necessary.

Note: Not all stress is bad. Stress induced by your desire to do your best is a positive. Channel it into your work. Not into your emotions.





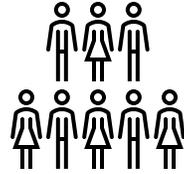
Prepare for the Future Now

Thinking & Acting Strategically

Thinking and acting strategically means frame what you do as a means of aligning with the vision, fulfilling the mission and living the values of your organization.

- **Adopt the big picture.** Study trends affecting conditions inside and outside your organization.
- **Think critically.** Learn to challenge assumptions and evaluate competing options.
- **Get comfortable with ambiguity.** Learn to embrace change and find ways to channel it to your advantage.
- **Trust your gut.** Make decisions based on what you know but also on what you think might happen.





Create Community

Community is the sense of belonging we feel when we work cooperatively and collaboratively for intended results. Being part of community requires living within the principles of psychological safety. Such principles establish a safe environment for people and teams to learn, cooperate and collaborate. Community does not demand uniformity; it embraces difference, inclusion and equal opportunity. ⁱⁱ

- Determine the purpose of your organization.
- Live the purpose by integrating it into your vision (*becoming*), mission (*doing*), and values (*belonging*).
- Communicate openly and transparently.
- Act with courage in the face of exclusion.
- Be bold in your ideas. Be humble in your demeanor.
- Celebrate results. Share credit widely.
- Live with a spirit of grace. Act with kindness and compassion.



ⁱ Adapted from *Hope Is Not a Method* by Gordon Sullivan and Michael Harper New York: Times Books, 1996 and used in my first book *Personal Leadership: Taking Care of Your Work Life* Rochester, MI: Elsewhere Press 2000

ⁱⁱ Amy Edmondson *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth* San Francisco: Wiley & Co 2017