

Hello, this is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thanks for tuning in as always. Today I want to talk about the three kinds of crisis leaders, and this is important because I mean we're in an unsettled period, the likes of which I haven't seen before. Even after some other well publicized and well-known events in our lives, this one seems to have taken on a life that's different from the others.

The source for this blog comes from my friend Arlin Sorenson. He's in our peer group, I think I've mentioned before, and I really enjoy his blog and get some terrific ideas. So, he began his blog yesterday with, "You never signed up to lead in a crisis." And boy you talk about an arresting first sentence that really got my attention, but he talks about the three kinds of crisis leaders and I think this summation, like all summations, it's general and broad, but it does have some kernels of truth in there that really grab me.

I think a crisis in some ways is like sports. I remember hearing one time that sports doesn't build character, it reveals character and if you see a guy and he's continually cheating on the golf course and improving his lie or calling the lines wrong in tennis or something like that, you really have to question what that is telling you about that person's character. I think crisis leadership may be revealing in the same way that sports is - sometimes revealing of people's character.

So, the first type of leader, first type of crisis leader, is the frozen leader. So, these people are not ready. They're really locked into their routines, they're locked into their norms and they're not very flexible at all. They'll be identified by saying things like, "It's outside of my control." Or, "Other organizations have more resources than we do to cope, and we just don't have the resources to get by," or, "There's nothing I can do. This is certainly something bigger than me."

I remember going through a bit of a crisis in one of my early jobs in my career. This was in the late eighties or early nineties or something like that. It was a really long time ago. We had what in that company, in that little company, could only be described as a crisis and the boss, a guy I really respected, this has always baffled me, went on vacation. So, on Monday, we got this announcement on Tuesday or Monday afternoon. He says, "Well, I'm going to be out for the next 10 days." Gone and he was a guy who was very much locked into routines and this unsettling event took place and man, he was literally absent. So, the troops, we got together and figured out what to do and came up with a plan and the plan didn't include him. We had looked to him as a leader and suddenly the leader is utterly absent. That didn't work out too well.

The second kind of leader, and I have to admit, in spite of myself, I don't want to be here, but this is the kind of leadership that I identify with. So, okay, yeah, we're having a bit of a crisis and things are unsettled right now. I'm looking forward to getting back to business as normal. Well, who knows? There are writers out there that say this is the new normal, it's not going to ever be back to normal. But those leaders change as little as they have to. They're anxious to get back to normal and they say things like, "We've made a few changes. Let's just lock in for now and hope these changes work and then we'll see a little bit later." Or they say, "We really can't make any more changes because we really need some stability in the organization right now." I think I can probably identify with this kind, this style.

Third there is the agile leader. These leaders are flexible and adaptable. They're ready to pivot, they're ready to make big changes, they're ready to go in a new direction and they say things like, "Our mission is too important to let these current events overwhelm it. We are going to achieve our mission," and they ask questions. This is

what is leadership is all about. What can we learn from other people? What are they doing to be successful that we can adapt into our own organization? What's your perspective? What do you think we should do? They ask the other people, the other rising and situational leaders in the organization. What can we learn? How can we do things differently? What can we do better? We've made a few changes, but I think if we made one more change even, we could do things even better.

So, the point in Arlin's blog is that in a time of crisis you're going to have to give up something. Maybe it's your routine, maybe it's a relationship, customer relationship, whatever it is. Doug McCright of The Family Business Institute says a brilliant thing. He says, "There's no perfect decision. There's always tradeoffs." There's always tradeoffs and so now in this period of unsettledness, we are making tradeoffs sometimes daily and those tradeoffs will help reveal our leadership.

Finally, Arlin closes with this, a quote from an article that he got back in 1980. "Opportunity is a definition, opportunity. Turbulence causes change and change is one man's opportunity and another's downfall." This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute challenging you. What kind of leader are you? Frozen, agile, or hesitant in this time of unsettledness? Thank you.