

Ten Tips for Leading Under Pressure

By Thom S. Rainer

Leadership can be difficult. Okay, I've just stated the obvious. Anyone who has led a group or organization knows that tough times and tough decisions are inevitable. The issue is not whether leaders will find themselves under pressure; the issue is how leaders will handle pressure. Allow me to offer ten suggestions.

1. Avoid spiritual slippage.

Many effective leaders are incredibly focused on their work, so much so that they neglect their spiritual disciplines. Leaders under pressure must depend more on prayer; they must spend more time in the Word; and they must realize their wisdom and their strength come from God.

2. Avoid family slippage.

Busy leaders sometimes neglect their families. Such leaders under pressure often disregard the most important people in their lives. Great leaders must first be the right kind of leader in their homes.

3. Avoid physical slippage.

I recently had my annual physical, and my physician once again reminded me that I needed to remain diligent in my exercising and eating habits. He noted there is no way I can sustain the energy necessary to cope with the pressures of my job unless I am taking care of my body.

4. Love those you lead.

Sometimes the pressure in leadership is great because we don't first love those we lead. Indeed we aren't really leaders at all unless we demonstrate Christ's love to those who are under our leadership.

5. Be transparent.

It takes so much more unnecessary energy to be someone we're not. Transparency means we are authentic and lead with integrity.

6. Admit and deal with mistakes quickly.

As I write this article, I am dealing with a tough issue where I made a leadership mistake. I have admitted my mistake and now feel the freedom to move forward. If

we postpone tough decisions, or if we do not own up to our mistakes, the pressure will only get worse.

7. Be accountable.

Every leader needs accountability to someone or to some group. Those persons should always be checking our actions and our motives. And when we face either internal or external pressures, these persons are among the first who can help us.

8. Use fun and levity as a balance.

Many leaders take themselves too seriously. We need to lighten up and laugh more. A truly joyous person can withstand almost any pressure.

9. Have a longer-term perspective.

The crisis of the moment often makes us feel as if our world is about to end. But leaders who understand that most issues will take care of themselves in time are better equipped to deal with the seemingly heavy burdens of the present.

10. Have an outside interest as an alternative focus.

I have three major outside interests: my grandchildren, reading, and Alabama football. When I am playing with one of my grandchildren, for example, I feel as if all the pressures I was feeling are really not that bad after all. Those grandchildren give me a healthy perspective.

Leadership is indeed difficult. And good leaders will always feel pressures and have problems they must address. But the most effective leaders will deal in healthy ways with those pressures and, as a result, be healthier leaders themselves.