

3 Options For a Leader When the Going Gets Tough

The scene is lodged deeply in my memory.



It was Saturday and the day had been spent in the home office—a day shoehorned full of workshop prep, project management, and working down my email inbox. And it was time to change it up. Time for a workout. So I laced up my Nikes and headed out for a run in the local neighborhood.

As I looped up and down the streets of my community, I came across a scene—make that a storyline—that at once gripped my heart and messed with my mind.

A couple in their mid 50s was walking down a quiet cul-de-sac. He was average height and appeared to be in good physical condition...but she was nothing of the sort. Her slow gait down the sidewalk was only made possible by his ever-deliberate assistance. Moments later, as I rounded the cul-de-sac and passed by the couple once more, I watched him gently help her stretch and exercise a body that was slowly being stolen by some form of cruel and debilitating disease. As they were in my line of sight for a few seconds, I could see that his face bore a storyline of care and confusion, of gentleness and devastation, of love and heartbreak. It brought tears to my eyes. It still does.

To this day, I continue to think about this couple. And in particular, I think about this husband—a husband who years earlier said “I do” without knowing what that might mean. A husband, who on a beautiful yet lonely Saturday afternoon, had rallied once more to fulfill a “for better or worse” commitment.

When I think about this scene, I often find myself reflecting on the call of leadership. The challenge of leadership. The commitment of leadership.

Not sure about you, but I've yet to show up for a leadership assignment that did not have its fair share of challenge—the unforeseeable type. And truth be told, at times, the unimaginable type.

So what do you do when you wake up one morning and find yourself in the middle of a leadership mess that you simply did not see coming?

You've got options. You've got choices. Maybe not a lot of them. But you do have them.

Let me list a few. And let me include the internal conversation that attends them:

- **Cut and run.** "I'm outta' here! This is not what I signed up for. I deserve something better. Someone else can clean up this mess. Last one out, turn off the lights."
- **Grin and bear.** "Bummer. Sure wished things were different. But, hey, life's full of twists and turns. I can ride this thing out. Besides, I've got some side-hustles that can keep me going."
- **Stay and trust.** "Didn't see this coming. This is messy. Hard."

(note where this conversation goes...)

"But I wonder what God is up to? He's given me this assignment, for better or worse. Pretty sure God is at work here, not only in this place to which I give leadership, but also and perhaps more importantly, in my own life."

Did you see it? Catch the difference?

Two simple takeaways.

First, leadership is a "for better or worse" commitment. Always has been. Always will be. You say "I do" to whatever comes your way. It's the nature of leadership. And more significantly, it's the heart of a leader.

Leadership is a "for better or worse" commitment...You say "I do" to whatever comes your way.

And second, some of your best growth moments will be birthed in some of the hardest leadership circumstances. It is in those seasons of leadership desperation that you come to grips with the reality that not only has God enrolled you in His schoolhouse, but you learn to trust in His faithfulness and provision in ways that are simply not possible when all is well.

Some of your best growth moments will be birthed in some of the hardest leadership circumstances.

Yep, you've got options.

But only one of those options will get you where you really want to go. And only one of those options will allow you to serve well the people who look to you for leadership.