

## Leadership Strategies for the Unexpected

**August 2014** – We were having an amazing time! Laughing. Joking. High-fiving.

To make the most of summertime, Pattie and I had invited a bunch of our friends to take a six-week dance class at the local studio. The agenda was simple: Learn a few moves for some upcoming weddings, and then rally for dinner afterwards. The plan was bullet-proof. At least I thought so...

Everything was going per plan as we were introduced to the basic box-step. Then the proverbial water got drained out of the pool. Thirty minutes into 'so you think you can dance' session #1, the instructor called an audible. Veering from the script, she announced that we will now change dance partners. Say what?! Learning to dance with my wife was challenging (read embarrassing) enough...and now you want me to dance with someone else? Didn't see that coming!

At that moment, our friends looked with disbelief at the dance instructor (who all the sudden looked more like a drill sergeant). And then realizing she was dead serious, every eye was riveted on Pattie and me. We didn't have to read anyone's mind, just lips: "What have you got us into and what do we do now!?"

That story serves as a note-to-file that the life of a leader is filled with seasons of the unexpected.

Times when you rock back in your Office Depot chair and whisper under your breath, "Wow, I didn't see that coming!"

What do you do when the uninvited, the unanticipated stares you down—daring you to flinch? Let me probe that question with you a bit and put two thoughts into play.

- **PLAN FOR IT.** The very nature of leadership is rooted in the reality that the unexpected is to be expected. This fact is captured extraordinarily well on the opening page of *Leading With a Limp*, where author and professor Dan Allender writes: *So here's the hard truth: if you're a leader, you're in the battle of your life. Nothing comes easily, enemies outnumber allies, and the terrain keeps shifting under your feet.*

Shifting terrain. True. So true.

Leadership is messy—no argument. Leadership is unpredictable—no argument. But there is also another inarguable reality of leadership—one that's fundamental to what it means to lead as a follower of Christ. As a leader, in the middle of the unexpected, you are given the choice to embrace the challenge not as an obstacle, but rather as an opportunity to walk by faith.

**Though not always easy or immediate, the leader who expects the unexpected can view an obstacle as a gift—a blank blueprint as it were upon which something new and fresh and original can find its expression.**

- **LEAD IN IT.** The most significant thing a leader can do in the middle of the unanticipated is to lead. Obvious, right? But how? How do you deliver point-person leadership in the chaos of uncertainty?

Allow me to serve as the broker between this question and some spot-on wisdom compliments of author and pastor Andy Stanley. In his book *The Next Generation Leader*, he divvies out an insight that needs to be in every leader's toolbox. Take a look for yourself: *You will consistently be called upon to make decisions with limited information. That being the case, your goal should not be to eliminate uncertainty. Instead you must develop the art of being clear in the face of uncertainty.*

**In short, you lead in uncertainty with clarity.**

Let's break that down. It's Monday morning. Your team has convened for its weekly meeting. Discussion ensues about some directional issues for your organization. Perspectives are aggressively presented. At the end of the dialogue there remains two viable options—neither has emerged as the obvious choice. There is uncertainty. It is at this point, with a mix of honesty, humility, and confidence the leader makes a decision about the option to be pursued—and does so with CLARITY. Everyone leaves the team huddle knowing exactly what play is to be executed next.

So the next time the unexpected lands on your doorstep, embrace it for the opportunity it is and lead through it with clarity, remembering that the past is God's record book of miracles fulfilled, but the future is His canvas of miracles yet to be.

**How do you lead in the middle of the unexpected?**

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