

Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times

-Peter L. Steinke
Alban @ 2006

The leader's presence can either be -Reactive or -Responsive

Anxiety - Derived from the Greek word meaning to "choke" or to cause pain by squeezing.

↳ "*ananke*" – "throat," "to press together"

word used for ring (neck, nose) on slaves,
related to English words: *anger, angst, angina*

Effects on human therapy & behavior can be either positive or negative.

Negative effects: -Repressive

-Infectious

-Reactive

Repressive- Tightness, narrowness, suffocation – anxiety tightens.

"In my distress (**zarar*) I called to the Lord..." (Ps. 18:6) *lit. "narrow space"

The antonym of "*zarar*" is "*yasha*" - "open space" - can be translated "salvation"

↳ (the base word for Yeshua/Jesus)

"The Lord is my light & my salvation (*yasha*); who shall I fear." (Ps. 27:1)

-anxiety tightens thinking, restrains behavior.

-simplifies thinking (yes/no, either/or)

-decreases our capacity to learn

-want quick fix

-replaces curiosity with demand for certainty.

-feeling of helplessness, self-doubt

-stiffens our position over another's

-defensive behavior

-interrupts concentration

-inflexibility

-floods nervous system (can't hear w/o distortion)

-imagination gridlock

Infectious- Ripple effect in organization

Acute anxiety- situational, time-based, momentary; can get back on track.

Example of acute anxiety – Peter in court and denying Jesus (Luke 22:62)

Chronic anxiety- perpetually present, not specific to a threat.

Any issue/topic/circumstance can provoke

little capacity to step out of experience/reflect.

Example of chronic anxiety – Israelites wandering in the wilderness.

Word "*infectious*" derived from the Greek word "*goggizo*"

(to grumble, murmur, complain, speak secretly).

Reactive - Automatic, no thought, instinctive. Media uses such anxiety to keep us tuned in.

-denial- "don't disturb" signs hung on every door

-oversimplifying "*they have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying "peace, peace,"*" (Jer. 6:14)

-without support – discouragement- disinterest

-ignoring (don't want to upset or offend)

-freezing, immobility – can put off inevitable momentarily

being stuck, tho', keeps you knee-deep in anxiety

-indecisiveness is reactivity, a defense against a split in the house

-scapegoating – indiscriminate at first,

then projected onto the most responsible or vulnerable.

Use anxious times as a springboard for change, learning, & different functioning.

13 Triggers for Anxiety in Congregations

(No particular order; usually 5 or 6 happen serially or simultaneously)

- money
- sex, sexuality
- pastor's leadership style
- lay leadership style
- growth, survival
- boundaries
- trauma, transition
- staff conflict
- harm done to/death of a child
- old & new
- contemporary & traditional worship (ie: hymnal, worship times)
- gap between ideal & real
- building, construction, space, territory

Differentiation - The relative ability of people to guide their own functioning by:

- thinking clearly
- acting on principle
- defining self by taking a position
- coming to know more about their own instinctive reaction to others
- learning to regulate those reactions
- staying in contact w/ others
- choosing a responsible course of action
- balancing 2 life forces...individuality & togetherness

Bowen Theory

Newtonian physics/thinking- (billiard ball approach).

atomic

Individuals, like atoms, only bounce off one another.

No interaction that affects each other- compartmentalization.

Quantum physics/thinking- there is no world composed of solid, individual parts unaffected by & unrelated to one another.

subatomic

Network, system- life is built of small discrete things

an invisible web of info lies at the core of life.

that are connected & interactive, dependant on and mutually affect each other.

“All the ‘createds’ are ‘relateds’.” (Larry Rasmussen, theologian)

-Relationships are played out in “emotional” processes.

Feelings and emotions are not synonymous (tho’ feelings are emotions) -Bowen

Emotionality - all the process that guide individuals automatically

-what happens when thoughtfulness is by passed

-reactions & the interrelatedness of these reactions

Emotional forces drive behavior that is reactive/reflexive/defensive.

We can behave more or less instinctually or thoughtfully depending on anxiety’s effect on us.

“Instinct” & “incite” share common root – to prick quick, sudden, immediate process.

Good for survival.

Strong emotional forces drive living organisms.

Lower levels of anxiety help sharpen/adapt.

Higher levels of anxiety severely restrict.

Differentiation- process by which 2 instinctually noted life forces, separateness & closeness, are managed by a person & within a relationship system.

One can be an individual only in a relationship

& a relationship can properly function only when individuals play distinctive roles in it.

Parker Palmer → differentiation embraces “the profoundly opposite truths that my sense of self is deeply dependant on others dancing with me & that I still have a self when no one wants to dance.”

To live a healthy life requires the capacity to stand apart & stand together. (a balance)

Both are sensitive to anxiety, which may create imbalance.

Leaders - balance point between - standing too far away from followers, or
- blending in too much

Loss of balance - emotional fusion or emotional cutoff

Fusion - Loss of self

-when one dominates & another dissolves into subservience

-when both are “nice” to tighten bond

-when each function to take care of another’s feelings

“Fused, muddy communion” composed of 2 “unclarified, unfinished, & still incoherent” people.

(Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 1984, pg 74)

Congregations are prone to fusion. “In an anxiety field, the group moves toward more togetherness to relieve the anxiety.” (Bowen)

-Can distort ability to discern & judge.

“The more influence group members have on each other, & the more contact they have with each other, the more likely they will believe the same thing & make the same mistake.” (James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*, 2004, pg 42)

-There is a difference between giving up self in *fusion* & doing so for *cooperation*.

Fusion is automatic, *cooperation* is chosen.

Cut Off - rather than standing out from others (differentiation)

a person may stand outside of their circle (cutoff).

An exaggeration for the need to be separate.

Cut-off is reactive, an automatic defense. Gains a sense of identity over/against another.

Defines self against another – self definition does not come from one’s own being.

The emotional distances become dogmatic, opinionated, doctrinaire.

ex. see Luke 18:9-14, parable of *Publican* (“I am guilty”) & *Pharisee* (“Thank God I’m not a publican”) when cut off, the anxiety continues, but awareness of it diminishes & displaces to others.

“A differentiated self is one who can maintain emotional objectivity while in the midst of an emotional system in turmoil, yet at the same time actively relate to key people in the system.” (Bowen, 485)

- takes “I positions” based on principles

- stays connected in a responsible way

Undifferentiation:

(instinctive, reactive, defenseless, thoughtless)

- accommodates, pleases, acts to take care of other’s pain

- focuses outside of self

- sets vague, bibulous goals

- connects emotionally

- seeks security

Differentiation:

(intentional, responsive, responsible, thoughtful)

- takes a stand

- focuses on self (i.e. sees how he contributes to the situation)

- stays connected to others (listening, exchanging ideas)

- sets clear goals

- seeks challenge

Non-anxious presence - keeps the center of control within oneself
- affects relationships in a positive manner
- focus on your own behavior & its modification,
rather than preoccupation with how others function

The non-anxious presence of congregational leaders has a positive effect

-less friction, more imagination, healthier functioning

Leadership is more about interaction (than action)

-regulation of reactivity when relating to others since anxiety can be infectious,
the leader does not want to be its source or transmitter

Exod. 32 – Golden calf episode – anxiety became contagious.

Aaron succumbed to the pressure of the moment, Moses took a stand.

Non-anxious presence is an anomaly; never a full-blown reality

It's a description of a way of being, when we:

- manage our own natural reactions
- use knowledge to suppress impulses & control automatic reaction
- keep calm – reflect, converse
- observe (especially oneself)
- tolerate uncertainty, frustration, pain
- maintain clear sense of direction

Biblical example of non-anxious presence:

“Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph 4:26);

*“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died,
so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope”* (1 Thess. 4:13);

*“Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil,
but in thinking be adults”* (1 Cor. 14:20);

*“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God”* (Philip. 4:6);

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all”
(Rom. 12:17);

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them” (Rom.12:14);

“...and self-control. There is no law against such things” (Gal 5:23),

“Like a city breached, without walls, is one who lacks self-control” (Prov. 25:28),

*“When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten;
but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly”* (1 Peter 2:23)

+ walk the 2nd mile, turn other cheek.

Respond rather than React

To be a non-anxious presence means to acknowledge anxiety, but not let it be the driver of behavior.

“Anxiety is there. Yet, now it is where I can see it. I won't let it slip back into unconsciousness. With it up front, I can tame and harness it...my emotional status is not in overdrive. I'll survive this; I can take the sting out of anxiety & be a calming agent.”

Not to be confused with being “cool” or being “nice”, nor denying anxiety.

Engaged, being there, taking the heat, witnessing the pain, yet not fighting fire with fire.

In any emotional system, automatic forces will be strong. They are intended to be powerful. They provide safety & ensure survival. That's precisely why our reactions to any kind of threat will be defensive. But we know that reactivity (defensiveness) will excite counter-reactivity from other people. At some point, we have to make a non-anxious response to break the cycle. (p.41)

The amygdale – reptilian/primitive brain – early warning system for danger
 Automatic response of “fight, flight, or freeze” (we are hardwired for survival)
 (side note – women often react to stress with “tend or befriend”)

Amygdala’s strength is quickness, not accuracy – yes/no, safe or dangerous, one or the other
 Generalize, stereotype

No sense of time – if a stimulus provokes fear response early in life, that stimulus is memorized.
 If repeated later, same reaction

When amygdale is active, 1) less info about immediate environment, & what’s happening available
 2) pool of objects which represent initial stimulus is much larger

Therefore, threat assessment deteriorates – things out of proportion
 Stress limits our repertoire of responses.

Under acute conditions, stress protects. Chronically activated, anxiety can produce only numbness in thinking, but also disease

On occasion, the amygdale – instead of sending signals to the brain stem for quick action (low road) – sends its signal to the cortex, the thinking brain (high road). With the thinking brain in charge, we can be - intentional rather than instinctive

- responsive instead of reflexive
- adaptive rather than defensive
- proactive instead of reactive

2nd thoughts
 (slow but accurate) reflective response

Sensory Cortex

Of course, there is a possibility of the renewal of tug of war as advanced and primitive systems vie for control

High road

Amygdala

Sensory Thalamus

rush to judgment
 quick & dirty
 Low road

Emotional stimulus

mindless reactivity

The left prefrontal cortex houses our humanity

It integrate info, inhibits emotional responses – enables humans to function in 6 unique ways.

- Humans can
- 1) project into the future
 - 2) exercise social competence
 - 3) observe self & environment
 - 4) use imagination
 - 5) think critically
 - 6) regulate emotional forces

[of course, lower brain can hijack the frontal lobes]

We need an active amygdale to warn us of danger.

We need the left prefrontal cortex to put a check on the amygdala.

Field Theory – field: a region of influence, happens when matter affects matter.

an environment created by its interaction (ex. electromagnetic field)

In an emotional field, people interact, mutually affecting one another’s behavior, functioning as they do because of the presence of one another.

In a field, particles (electrons or people) will not necessarily function according to their nature, habit or personality.

What is important is the individual’s position in the field.

Change the particle’s position & it appears to have a different nature.

Because of a leader's position, the leader affects the whole field most significantly.

<u>Circumstance</u>	(positive) <u>Influence</u> (of leader)	or the <u>opposite</u>
Crisis	Calm	React
Bewilderment	Focus	
Stagnancy	Challenge (initiate)	Avoid
New Situations	Change	Block

communicated thru who s/he is (demeanor, spirit, poise), as well as thru thoughtful functioning.

Crisis/Calm

At times of crisis, a congregation functions best when its key leaders are differentiated. The crisis certainly ushers in confusion, despair, & a temporary period of powerlessness and hopelessness. It is a crucial time for the community to slow down and reflect on what happened. The natural instinct is just the opposite – to press immediately for decision, explanation, actions.

A structure of some sort is needed, something to hold the parts together.

Bewilderment/Focus

If a congregation is not focused on its mission, it will focus on something,
Perhaps on the budget,

The past glory days
The pastor's performance

→ Focus on what is possible
& see the opportunity
buried in the confusion

Peter Drucker's Self Assessment:

- 1) What is our mission?
- 2) Who is our customer?
- 3) What does the customer value?
- 4) What are the results?
- 5) What is our plan?

Stagnancy/Challenge

Wind challenges a tree's branches such that they gain sufficient strength to hold fruit

A leader functions like the wind

A leader challenges, tho', at a rate people can absorb

& at an opportune time, such as when:

- the community hits rock bottom
- real events open eyes and sharpen awareness
- a sudden shattering experience occurs
- the congregation is in a learning mode

People are not automatically
opposed to challenge,
stretching is good for muscles.

& someone excites their attention

New Situations/Change

Western society is experiencing a shift from one historic period to another

From a focus on continuity to living with constant radical change.

Rapid transformation is becoming a normal way of life. Movement within church:

<u>From:</u>	<u>To:</u>
Intellectual approach to faith	Experience of faith
Following denominational/family ties	Shopping for a church
Organized around a neighborhood	Organized around a region
Structure is vertical (top down)	Horizontal structure (networks/teams)
Info and Knowledge key	Certainty is important
Verbal communication	Visual communication
Loyalty to institution	Participation in meaningful groups
Worship as strengthening faith	Worship as evangelism

Friedman → “Not only are we entering a millennium of perpetual novelty, but also the future promises a continuous escalation in the rate of change... The change will have a significant effect on the emotional processes of all families & other institutions.”

Temptation for leadership is to avoid, focusing instead upon togetherness, equilibrium,
tranquility, unity at all costs,

what Friedman calls “Peacemonger – a highly anxious risk avoider,
more concerned with good feelings than progress
the antagonism of the anxious is proportionate to the nice of the leader.

Distress is not always an obstacle to learning. Pain can be a real teacher.

The anxiety that spurs growth is survival anxiety, when you chose something new
because survival itself is at stake. Tolerance for pain is needed by a leader

- recognize resistance is normal, don't take it personal
- relationships are reciprocal & interactive – calm reflective leadership is a positive
- have patience!
- in setting goals, avoid giving in to the ‘pressure of the moment’ (i.e. quick fix)
- tolerate anxious times as opportunities
- manage your own anxiety

Thinking about change:

- you can never make only one change. Change creates change.
- change arouses survival instincts
- no transformation happens without a crisis
- no significant change in history happened because a majority voted for it
- change starts small and grows larger
- “Those who come 1st are the last to accept new ideas.” (Friedman)

(paradox of the change agent who, once his/her change is completed, tends to block or stall
the new change of someone else)

- no emotional system will change unless people change how they function
- learning is change. Resistance is stronger with what is less familiar
- change is stimulated when we
 - look at things from a different angle
 - associate with new people
 - pass thru a critical moment
- “Our brain is much better at changing the world, than living with that change.”
- “Congregations that systematically avoid conflict likely avoid change.”

Biblical Creation story – begins with chaos – undifferentiated & unintegrated mass

God separates & consolidates

- differentiation,
boundaries

Naming – process extends to language

Adam given task of differentiating/naming

“The founding function of differences ... is the basis of all languages.” (Roland Barthes)

Boundaries are necessary for relationships and human identity

┌ “existence” (*ex-sistere*) means “stand apart”
└ are where the other and I meet → the essential edge

→ provide identification, connection, & protection (bark, skin, atmosphere)

Where boundaries exist in relatively stable form, life is present. In its absence, return to chaos.

Leaders are pivotal in creating and maintaining healthy boundaries, especially in anxious times.

The cell is the basic unit of life, the word “cell” deriving from the Latin “*cellulae*” – “a small room”

By definition, a cell has boundaries. As it matures, it differentiates – it limits its responses to a single task. It cooperates with other cells to create an entity larger than itself. Note similarities with human society.

Few viruses pose a threat. Pathogenesis (the invasion of infectious organisms) begins when the virus become aggressive. Lacking equipment to replicate on their own, they need help and target certain tissue – fusing or burrowing into that cell’s membrane. Infection depends upon the interaction between the surfaces of the virus and the host cell – a loss of integrity of the cell’s surface or boundary, an overstepping of the line, a biologic misinterpretation of borders. Manipulation occurs.

Anxious, reactive people function in a similar way – violating boundaries, manipulating others. Often the person violated plays a part, tolerating, enabling, confusing not being confrontive with being loving. The truth is some individuals are chronically anxious and lack the ability to self regulate. Left unchecked, they continue to harm. Good relationships require good membranes (boundaries).

Immunity protects against invasion. Leaders supply for the community what the immune system provides for the body. In the body, the immune system distinguishes cell from virus, with a 2-part response – adaptive and innate. The innate is the frontline, first defense, allowing time for the adaptive system to prepare its defenses with antibodies.

Congregations are similar with frontline leaders who serve as sentinels, who sense when things are out of balance. These gatekeepers have *proximity*, seeing first-hand, up close. They have *knowledge* of events not widely known. They realize the *cost or consequence* if something isn’t done. They have *relationship* with the persons being harmed.

(shift from virus to cancer paradigm)

- Unlike normal cells, Cancer cells
- recklessly overproduce
 - have no programmed cell death (called *apoptosis*)
 - lack mechanisms to stick together, and break away, attaching to surrounding cells (*metastasis*)
 - lose their capacity to differentiate, and do not become part of the mission of living tissue (a “me only” disease)

Congregations, likewise, deal with cancerous personalities.

Communities/bodies do poorly without immunity. People in our communities who lack the ability to self regulate will invade, intrude, trespass, attack, and rudely interfere – making a mess. Silence and avoidance on the part of the leader only enables the disease process.

Conflict is inevitable, a part of living.

Task is to move past “we versus they” scenario, and instead turn conflict into opportunity.

The mere reduction of anxiety is fool’s gold, the lessening of tension mistaken for resolution of conflict.

Did pain become a teacher? Did we learn/change anything?

Conflict Habits: (patterns congregations develop to survive... but not resolve):

- Peace Mongering* (see above)
- False Attribution* – equating conflict with sin/evil, the work of Satan (i.e. incompetence is not a sin)
- Neglect or Denial*
- Avoidance or Accommodation* (clergy rank high here)
- Idealistic Expectations*

New Aggressiveness on the increase in congregations

Polarization. Balance disturbed more by strong reactions to each other, than by issues/events.

Goal is to win, or more so – to make the other hurt. Conflict leads not to learning but conquering.

When conflict regresses to forceful competition

- People function out of primitive brain – everything becomes black/white, us/them
- Emotionality drives the competition. Reason backs off
- Behaviors become more aggressive
- Lying increases – half truths, w/holding info, funky stats, fabrications, making private public
- Self-righteousness emerges

Different Outcomes -No such thing as conflict-free church

- Jesus faced it. Tension led to crucifixion. Early church began amid divisions.
- Nowhere in the Bible is tranquility preferred to truth or harmony to justice.

There comes a *Turning Point*, where conflict either creates positive responses or becomes negative.

Positive path aided by:

- Respecting the sheer strength of survival instincts.* Expect substandard behavior.
Thoughtfulness will reappear as primitive instincts subside. But craziness has to play out
- Seeking clarity.* Ask questions. Weigh info. Remember, tho, clarity not always comfortable to all.
- Observing behavior.* View systems at work (Bowen theory)
- Informing.* Providing info tends to minimize need to create info thru gossip/rumor,
esp. in early stages of conflict.
Sharing info treats people as adults, not children needing to be protected from it.
- Structuring a process.* Flow of anxiety (which flows in all directions) needs to be contained.
People see orderly process & think things are not totally out of control... Specific goals.
- Reframing the situation.* Seeing as opportunity for growth. Pain makes for strength.
- Building up the congregation's emotional bank account.* Once conflict subsides, provide aftercare
Promote a steady flow of positive interactions - +programs, supportive gatherings, etc.
When conflict occurs again, people can draw from this "account," which draws interest
- Bringing in a third party,* esp. when conflict escalates to an impasse.

20 Observations from Steinke

(pp. 113-117)

1. Most people are interested in relieving their own anxiety rather than managing the crisis or planning for a clear direction. Their primary goal is anxiety reduction not congregational renewal.
2. Under certain conditions, anxiety is neutral. As much as possible, effective leaders normalize anxiety. Considering what is happening, anxiety's presence is what we would expect. By normalizing, people will not automatically think it is because the community is flawed.
3. If anxiety is high, people lose their capacity to be self-reflective. They look outward, not at themselves. Self-awareness is dim. And the ability to identify with the life processes of others is impaired.
4. Peace is often preferred over justice. Congregational members can resist or be hesitant about taking stands, making decisions, or charting a course of action that would offend or upset the community. Thus, they play into the hands of the most dependent people who can threaten to incite disharmony as a way to receive what they want.
5. If an individual becomes the lightning rod for people's anxiety and cannot extricate him/herself from that position through self-differentiation (or the environment is so perverse that no one can escape from that position), trying to maintain his or her position or presence in the emotional system is unproductive and as well as painful.
6. All disease processes are enabled. Viruses need host cells. Not all people designated by anxious systems as the patient are sick. The illness is in the interactive system.
7. The way we use information is an emotional phenomenon; what we hear and don't hear, what we remember, how we gather and exclude data are all connected to emotional processes. We gravitate toward information that coincides with our viewpoints and that promises to contribute to our survival.

8. The healing process for midrange to severely anxious congregations takes two to five years.
 9. Losses (membership, offerings, attendance) will result no matter what choices are made. Most congregations regain their losses within two years.
 10. Secrets-that is, hidden agendas and invisible loyalties-in most cases need to be brought to light. What about sin and evil? Expect it; expose it. To expose the demonic, name it.
 11. Reactivity can issue from people who are leaders, erudite, talented, wealthy, well-educated, pious, charming, or normally calm folks. None of the above characteristics indicate that these individuals are mature emotionally.
 12. Issues must be clearly identified and individuals must be challenged to act. No anxious congregation can handle more than three to five issues at a time. The issues must be condensed.
 13. The sabotage of a process to deal with conflict should be expected. The usual saboteurs will be those who are losing control or not getting what they want from the process.
 14. Murray Bowen claimed that all dyads are unstable. Therefore the basic molecule of all relationship systems is a triangle (the use of a third party to reduce tension between a twosome). Triangle formation is natural. Triangulation is another matter. It happens when the third party allows the original dyad to escape responsibility for its actions by assuming their anxiety and taking responsibility for them. Whenever a congregation brings in a third party, such as an intervention team, there is a triangle. Triangulation would occur if the team became anxious and felt responsible for the conflict's outcome.
 15. Five styles of managing conflict have become commonplace: accommodating, problem solving, compromising, avoiding, and fighting. They are useful for recognizing general patterns of behavior under pressure. But they are not helpful when used as predictors. People do not function in the same way in every context. One may begin as a fighter, only with time to become an accommodator. Further, not all avoiders or problem solvers are equal. There's a range to their functioning. People's functioning is not determined by a style but by the context.
 16. Recent research challenges the prevailing assumptions about conflict behavior being mutually exclusive. For example, direct fighting and problem solving are more effective in combination than they are in isolation. The continuous repetition of fighting, then problem solving, and then fighting is effective.
 17. How the conflict is framed affects the behavior of those involved. When the conflict is conceptualized as cost or benefit, the participants' behavior changes. People become more involved if they anticipate losses as a result of the conflict than if they anticipate gains. Losses arouse greater emotional force. Researchers found that a prospect of loss led to less yielding behavior. Even when the opponent is about to suffer a loss, there is more cooperation from the other side than if the opponent enjoyed a profit."
 18. No emotional system will change unless the members of the system change how they interact with one another. Patterns of behavior tend toward rigidity. Conflict may be necessary to jolt and jar the shape of things in order to reshape the pattern. But the degree to which that change is positive or negative depends on the leadership present to respond to it.
 19. The parties involved in a rift are in a poor position to settle the dispute if anxiety is high and rampant. Being too closely and emotionally involved in a circumstance, they will find it difficult to provide a fair overview.
 20. Final or perfect solutions are not available. Conflict leaves things messy. The best solutions to insolvable problems are the approximate solutions - ones that prepare a system for new learning and a new beginning.
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Emotional systems seek homeostasis (balance and stability). Sometimes, in order to lead, a leader must upset the balance. This requires “the courage to be fully present insistent, assertive ways, the kind of courage that finest Christian piety often avoids” (Brueggemann)

The Indo-European word “leith” (lead/leader) means “to go forth, to die.” In Dutch, one of the words for leader might be translated “martyr” – one who suffers. To lead risks resistance and rejection.

“Followers want comfort, stability, & solutions from their leaders, but that’s babysitting. Real leaders ask hard questions and knock people out of their comfort zones. Then they manage the resulting distress.” (Ronald Heifetz)

Heifetz and Martin Linsky (*Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*) distinguish between *technical* and *adaptive* problems. Each requires a different response. Confusing the two types will result in ineffective responses. When we are dealing with technical problems, we use know-how and follow a set of procedures. Adaptive problems, however, involve challenges to deeply held values and well-entrenched attitudes. They require new learning.

Technical Problems

- Problems are amenable to solutions.
- People already know what to do and how to do it.
- Leaders know the answer and take corrective action.
- Problems are not trivial, but solutions are within a person's abilities.
- Solutions are not necessarily easy, but expertise and knowledge are available.

Adaptive Problems

- Problems demand change in values, attitudes, and behaviors.
- People's hearts and minds need to change, not only their likes and dislikes.
- Problems surface that no existing technical expertise can solve.
- Leaders ask questions that challenge people's beliefs.
- Problems require a mindset shift that will result in some loss, especially for people who benefited from previous circumstances or patterns.
- People are challenged to use their competence to bring about new solutions. Leaders bring people's attention to the problem and expect them to take responsibility for it.
- Problem solving involves new experiments, uncertainty, and loss.

To recognize and treat a problem as an adaptive challenge will rock the emotional boat. You will receive few accolades. But without the willingness to challenge people’s expectations of quick and easy solutions, a leader will be subservient to those expectations – the deep problems will persist... “Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people’s habits, beliefs & values.” (Heifetz & Linsky)

Our neocortex (thinking brain) is divided into 2 hemispheres which play different but complementary roles in learning. The right handles novelty, exploration and the unfamiliar; the left – routine, storage of useful info, & the known. All learning begins on the right and proceeds to the left. When processing, the brain asks, “have I confronting this before?” If not, the right lights up. If so, the left. The 2 interact, but each has a unique function.

Adaptive change involves stimulation of the right hemisphere... The right not only processes new info, but also our negative emotions – like frustration, anxiety, anger. The left is active with positive feelings such as love. No wonder that the known/familiar are pleasing to most, while what is new can be irritating or intimidating

Much of what Jesus taught involved adaptive change (ex. good Samaritan, rich young ruler, healing on Sabbath, etc.). Prophets deal in adaptive work.

Leadership involves a “double blind bind” – “Protect us and provide us with direction,” but not if it means uncertainty, pain, or loss. Self-management critical. While anxiety spreads fast, the effects of a thoughtful approach are slower but eventually more effective and beneficial.

Extended discussion of Moses and Aaron in light of Bowen theory (p. 141-146)

“Solid self” – not negotiable to satisfy what others want of us. (ex. Moses)

“Pseudo self” – overly sensitive to other’s opinions & too willing to do what others want (ex. Aaron), emotionally fused, no constraints – understandings distorted without differences.

A negotiable self is a self w/o principles.

Moses represents the leader who is willing to challenge,

Aaron the leader who does what is necessary to survive, a leader who follows.

Only when automatic responses are interrupted in some way are automatic outcomes changed. Only when we see the crisis before us as a challenge instead of just plain survival is adaptive change possible. But adaptive change requires a period of disorientation. We don’t know what’s coming next, a strange wilderness. The safe is gone, and not until we live thru it do we come to a new beginning –a reorientation.

When people stagger into this wilderness, 3 patterns form:

The *instant solution*, the *short term fix*, and *adaptive change*

1. *instant solution*

Leaders act in a placating or rescuing manner to extinguish the flame of reactivity. They do not get outside the anxious system to take thoughtful stands. They sacrifice learning for the comfort of the moment and rapid return to stability.

2. *short term fix*

As the anxiety driven processes escalate in mindless fashion, leaders get a little distance from their stress and slow down their responses. Sense of urgency but not panic. Ultimate aim – reduce people’s anxiety in the short term (let dust settle), but no one gets to the root of the problem. Learning still doesn’t happen because leader’s primary objective is anxiety reduction.

3. *adaptive change*

For leaders to act on the courage of their convictions rather than on the power of their feelings takes time. Yet courage enables leaders to resist those who insist on immediate relief or who want to take care of things in order to excuse themselves from making a tough decision.

Only pattern 3 allows for new learning. If a congregation does not use the disorientation period for understand what has happened and take steps to shift the system, the chances are great for patterns 1 & 2 to repeat themselves. No emotional system changes unless people change how they function together.

Challenge leaders

Take thoughtful action

Risk goodwill for sake of truth

Stay the course / hold steady

Manage self

Survival leaders

Take expedient action based on emotional pressures.

Play it safe for the benefit of preserving stability

Use quick fixes for restoring harmony

Find scapegoats to blame, look outside side for rescue

There is within you a lamb and a lion. Spiritual maturity is the ability to let lamb and lion lie down together. Your lion is your adult, aggressive self. It is your initiative-taking and decision-making self. But there is also your fearful, vulnerable lamb, the part of you that will easily become a victim of your need for other people’s attention. The art of spiritual living is to fully claim both your lion and your lamb. Then you can act assertively without denying your

own needs. And you can ask for affection and care without betraying your talent to offer leadership.” (Henri Nouwen, *The Dance of Life*, p. 156)