

Living and Leading in an Age of Anxiety

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The Center for Vital Leadership

Anxious Church Anxious People

**How to Lead Change
in an Age of Anxiety**



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Matthew 6:25-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,^[k] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?^[l] ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God^[m] and his^[n] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

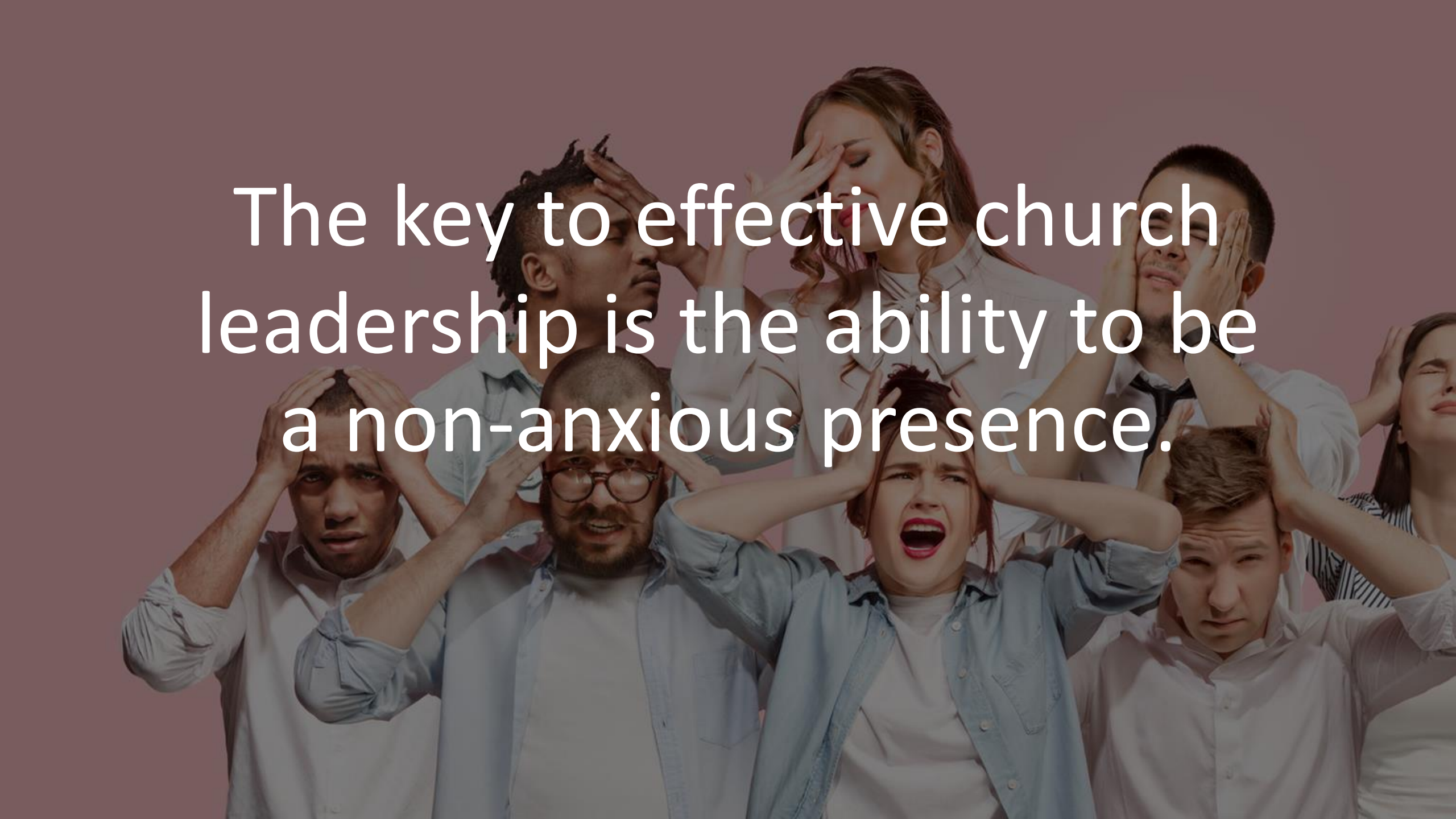


Five Characteristics of Anxious Systems

1. Reactivity
2. Herding
3. Blame Displacement
4. Quick-Fix Mentality
5. Lack of Well-Differentiated Leadership

Discussion

- What characteristics of an anxious system do you see:
 - In society
 - In The United Methodist Church
 - In your congregation

A group of diverse people, including men and women of various ethnicities, are shown in a state of distress. They are all wearing light blue button-down shirts. Many of them have their hands pressed against their heads, eyes closed, or mouths open in a cry of pain or frustration. The background is a solid, muted pink color. The overall mood is one of collective suffering or anxiety.

The key to effective church leadership is the ability to be a non-anxious presence.

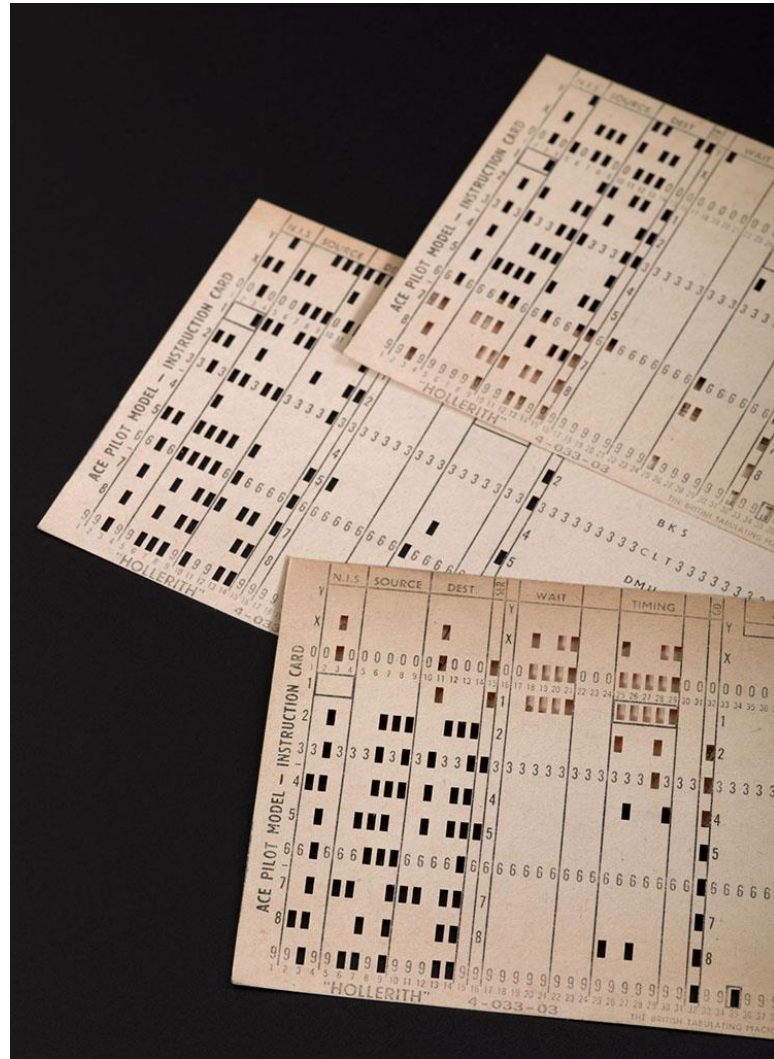
Effective leaders are able to say what they believe, in a non-anxious way, while giving others the freedom to disagree.



Nobody likes to be told what to do.

“The capacity of a family member to define his or her own life’s goals and values apart from surrounding togetherness pressures.” (Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue, p. 27)

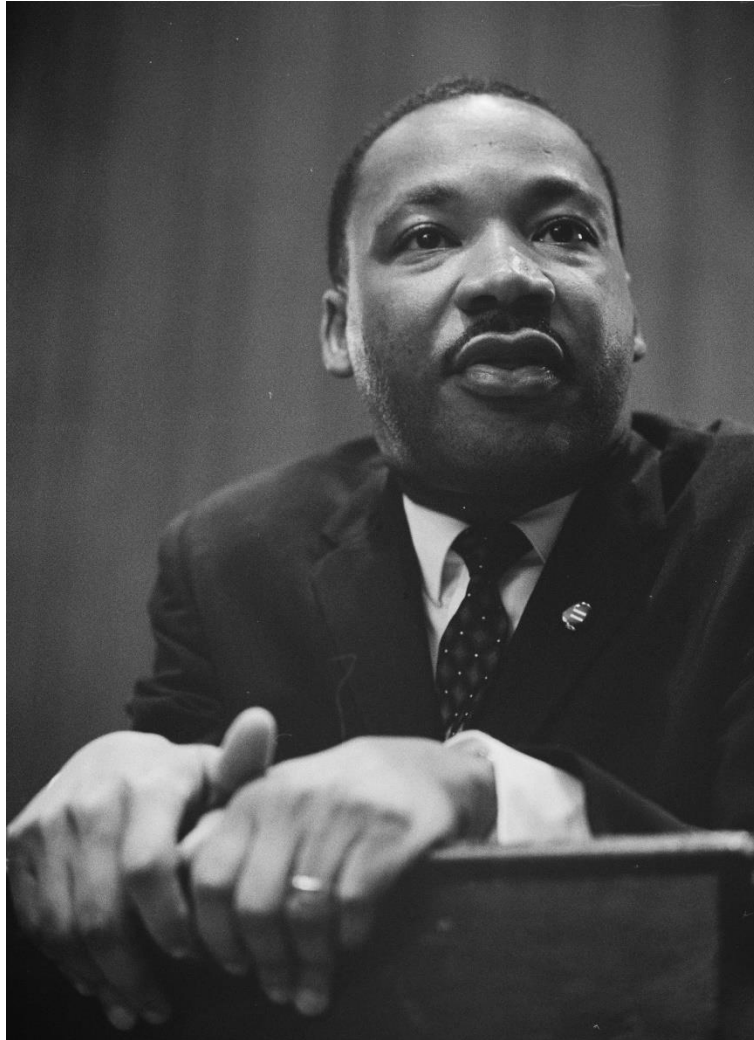






Leadership through Self-Differentiation

“The basic concept of leadership through self-differentiation is this. If a leader will take primary responsibility for his or her own goals and self, while staying in touch with the rest of the organism, there is more than a reasonable chance that the body will follow. There may be initial resistance but, if the leader can stay in touch with the resisters, the body will usually go along. (Generation to Generation, p. 229)



“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

“I have decided to stick to love...Hate is too great a burden to bear.”

“As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways in which I could respond to my situation -- either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course.”

Leadership through Self-Differentiation:

- Self-definition
- Emotional Connection



Discussion

- Which is easier for you:
 - Self-Definition
 - Emotional Connection
- How does this affect your leadership effectiveness?

Emotional Triangles



An emotional triangle is formed by any three persons or issues. The basic law is that when any two parts of a triangle become uncomfortable with one another, they will focus on the third person, or issue, as a way to stabilize their own relationship with one another.

Triangles within the Church

- The choir director and a church member each complain to the pastor about the other.
- A church member, the budget (financial problems) and blame displacement toward the denomination.
- A church member, grief over the leaving of a previous pastor and blame displacement toward the current pastor.
- A woman, her husband who doesn't come to church and her criticism of the worship service.
- A man, unresolved issues with his brother and his overinvestment in committee work at church.
- A church member, grief over a dying spouse and anger at the pastor for not doing enough.
- The pastor, congregation and complaints about the spouse's involvement at church



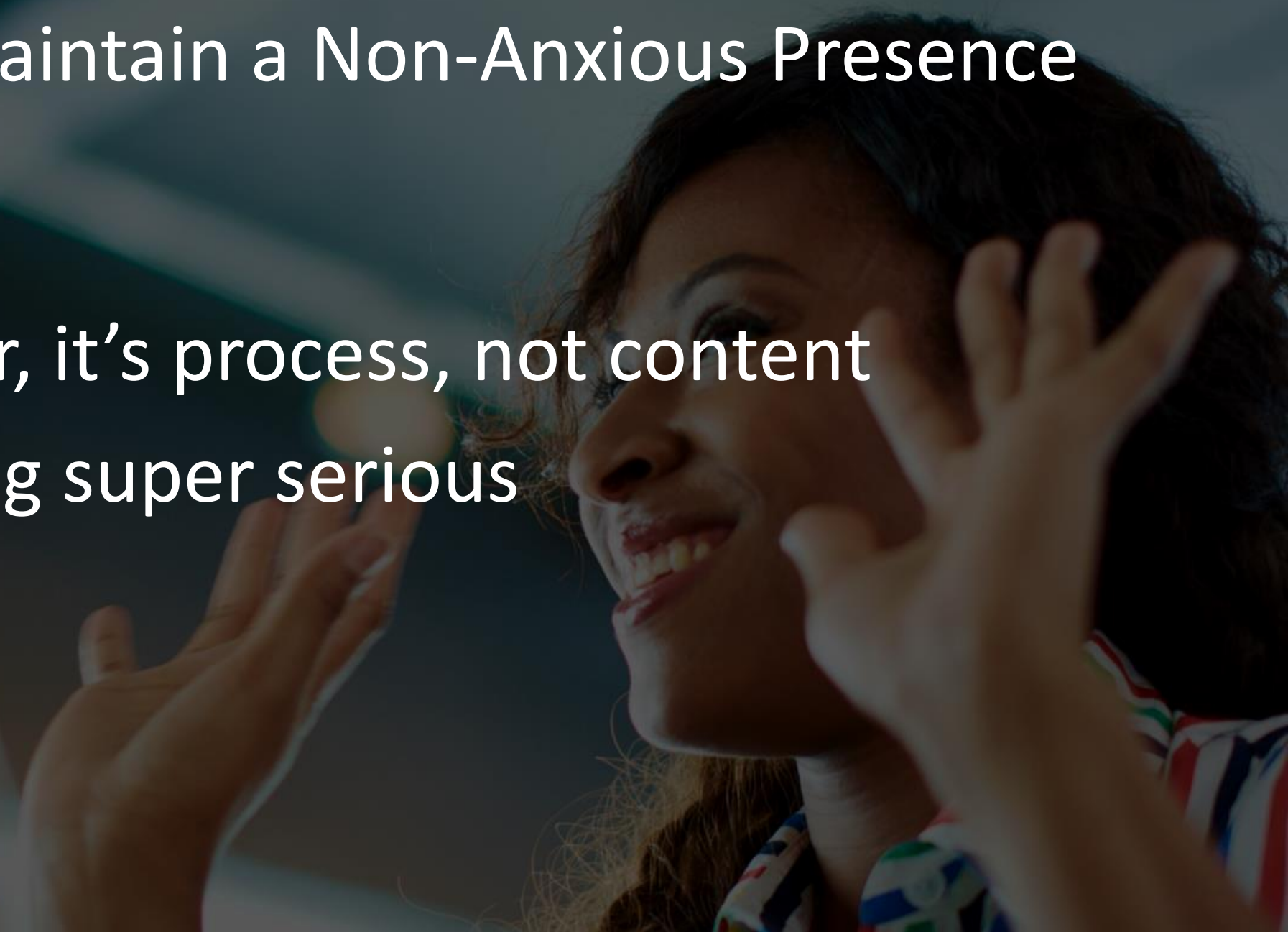
It's Process NOT Content

Pain and Responsibility



How to Maintain a Non-Anxious Presence

- Listen
- Remember, it's process, not content
- Avoid being super serious

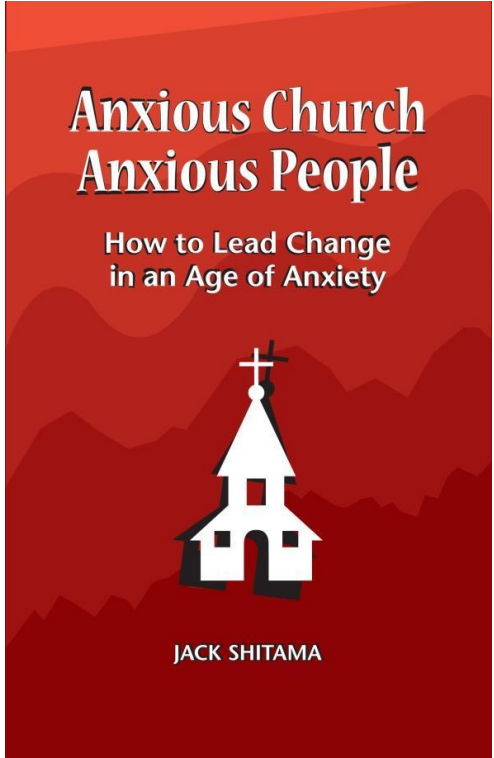
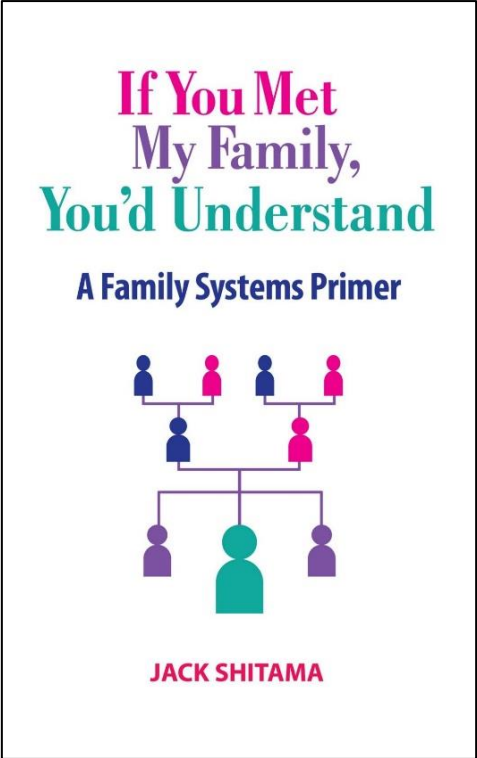


The Center for Vital Leadership

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“Now, Lord, with your help, I shall become myself.”

- Søren Kierkegaard