

Leading in Times of Uncertainty

by John C. Maxwell

When do the people need a leader the most? The answer is, in times of uncertainty. When is it the most difficult to lead people? The answer is, in times of uncertainty.

I have found in times of crisis and uncertainty, the tendency is for people to freeze - they stand still. They basically say, "I don't know if I want to make a decision." On the other hand, leaders must constantly be leading, even in times of uncertainty.

One of the best examples I can use to illustrate how to lead in times of uncertainty is Rudy Giuliani because of his incredible leadership in New York City during the 9/11 crisis.

Here's a passage from Time Magazine, which named him the Person of the Year for 2001.

On the morning of September 11th, primary day of the New York City, Rudy Giuliani was paddling along with all the other lame ducks into oblivion. The tower of strength had become an object of pity: the iron man's cancer made him vulnerable, the righteous man's adultery made him hypocritical, the loyal man's passions - for his city and its cops and its streets and its ballplayers - divided the city even as he improved it. After abandoning Gracie Mansion, his marriage in flames, he was camping out with a friend on the Upper East Side, and now it was time to choose his successor, and the end was in sight.

The end was, in fact, just a few blocks away. Having raced to the scene at the first news of the attacks, Giuliani was nearly buried alive. In the hours that followed, he had to lock parts of the city down and break open others, create a makeshift command center and a temporary morgue, find a million pair of gloves and dust masks and respirators, throw up protections against another attack, tame the mobs that might be looking for vengeance and somehow persuade the rest of the city that it had not been fatally shot through the heart.

It was an occasion to discover what we already were. "Maybe the purpose of all this," Rudy Giuliani said at a funeral for a friend, "is to find out if America today is as strong as when we fought for our independence or when we fought for ourselves as a Union to end slavery or as strong as our fathers and grandfathers who fought to rid the world of Nazism and communism." The terrorists, he argues, were counting on our cowardice. They've learned a lot about us since then, and so have we.

But at the dawn of the new millennium, New York mayor Rudy Giuliani emerged from the ashes of the smoldering World Trade Center rubble to calm a frightened and anxious nation. And by leading the city through a crisis of unimaginable horror diabolically designed to cripple the most powerful country on earth, Giuliani staked his claim as this century's first great leader.

What happens when people are uncertain?

1. They look for security.

People that are uncertain want to hold onto something that they believe will give them security.

2. They reach out for hope.

Napoleon said that leaders are dealers in hope.

3. They do nothing.

The tendency is for them to freeze.

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