

SMALL BUSINESS

How loss can help you gain depth and focus

“Every life is marked by necessary losses — all holding potential yet hidden gain.”

— Patricia Wisdom

This has been a year in which many have experienced loss. The most significant are those where loved ones have died. As a former “army brat” my heart goes out to those military families who are grieving the loss of a loved one. There also are those who have lost physical capacity are caught up in a health crisis.

Other losses can be the end of a marriage, a friendship or a partnership. People have lost valued employees or customers or even their company or place of employment. Loss is extremely hard for all of us and all too often the grief or pain is compounded by multiple losses hitting us in quick succession.

For leaders, loss presents unique challenges. Even as those around a leader struggle to cope with a loss, the leader must deal with both his or her own grief or sadness while also working to rally and support others. It is difficult in the face of pain and grief to deal with personal feelings and, at the same time, actively engage, encourage and re-focus others.

Yet, that is the unique challenge every leader must face at different points in time. Loss



IN THE LEAD

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is a fact of life and a reality for every person and every enterprise.

There are losses and then there are losses. Not all are the same. Some are debilitating, while some have hidden potential for gain, for growth and personal realization. I think of the quote, “What does it profit a man if he gain the world but lose his soul?” When any of us lose our sense of inspiration or of hope we are lost indeed.

When we lose material goods or wealth or even physical capacity, as long as we have hope or faith or inspiration, we can find gain in the midst of loss.

What is the hidden gain I mean? It can be a deeper appreciation for the love of family and close friends. The gain can be a deeper surrender or reliance on a higher power that upholds and sustains us. The gain can be an awakening to greater insights and self-awareness — to hidden strengths and capacities we had not imagined before.

Often, in the midst of challenge, we find our best selves.

Loss leads to gain when the fire of our pain and travail forges a deeper sense of strength and personal courage. Often, we do not fully know what we are made of — we do know our true depth of spirit until we are plunged into the rigors and suffering of significant loss.

Leaders, too, are not truly tested or at their best until they have been challenged by loss — both personally and professionally. How a leader responds to it and how he or she engages others in the process can make or break the willingness of others to follow and to seize some gain out of the pain.

Examples of leaders who have done this historically are Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Abraham Lincoln. It is interesting to note that all three had suffered personal significant losses that led to their gaining a deeper level of spirit and compassion.

For example, Roosevelt lost the use of his legs to polio and found a profound inner strength in the process. Lincoln suffered from depression

and had many other significant losses prior to become president. Nelson Mandela who led South Africa out of Apartheid and away from a potential blood bath had lost 27 years of his life to being imprisoned. Indeed, all great leaders have experienced tremendous loss and they have gained in strength, spirit, insight, compassion and personal power as a result.

The irony of it all is that the longer we live, and the more successful we have been, the more losses we will get to experience. Understanding that fact can help navigate through the times of pain and come out the other side with an important gift of strength and spirit.

After all, in the end, everything we love and value, everyone we cherish, will be exactly what we have to let go off when we face our inevitable death. How we live our lives and respond to the losses that accompany them helps to prepare us for the final loss — and, perhaps, the greatest gain.

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