

3 Ways to Respond to Weird Leadership

Have you ever found yourself in an unhealthy situation?

My earliest season in ministry was both fun and a little frustrating at the same time. It didn't take long after joining the staff team at my church before I knew there was some dysfunction somewhere. Though it wasn't obvious ... something lurked under the surface.

Hints of mistrust.

Veiled conversations.

Sideways glances that suggested far more than what's verbalized.

Disclaimer: I think it's fair to say, everyone has bad seasons in their lives. No doubt there are plenty of people that could tell stories of the calamities of my leadership. I don't want to villainize this particular person. My desire is to paint a picture of what was in hopes that what I learned could help others.

The team I joined displayed unhealthy signs though I couldn't figure out why. Everyone seemed to genuinely love each other. All my peers seemed to have an authentic desire to see the other person successful. I wish I could say that I remained respectfully above the fray. But I didn't. I listened to the conversations, added my own conjecture and found myself mired in interpersonal funk that felt like inescapable quicksand.

John Maxwell is well-known for the statement,

"Everything rises and falls on leadership."

In this circumstance, I was staring that truth in the face. Leadership (or the lack thereof) was the culprit.

The leader of this team was unhealthy. She had an agenda that appeared to align with the vision and strategy of the church. But it didn't fully. And the longer she led, the more that came to light.

She held a perspective toward life that seemed to align with the perspectives held by her leadership. But not fully. And the longer she shepherded, the more the disparity surfaced.

The last 15 years of leading people have taught me that Time and Truth are our friends. Both have clarifying effects on the plans and intentions of others. Time and Truth reveal what isn't obvious. They reveal what lies under the surface damaging what's above.

That's exactly what happened in this circumstance. Over time this leader's motivations and postures surfaced. In response, her direct leaders worked to guide her to a better place. Unfortunately she was not as gracefully responsive. In efforts to solidify her position, she worked to create alliances with her team. To define the circumstance as unhealthy is an understatement.

Navigating that situation was challenging. But *(by God's grace and some great mentoring)* there are a few steps I took that helped me respond in life-giving, equity-building ways.

Step 1: Look for the fruit

When you find yourself in the midst of situations like these, it's difficult to see things from the right perspective. You're too close to it. It wasn't until I confided in someone I trusted outside of the situation that my perspective changed. My friend challenged me to look for the fruit. Specifically the fruits of the Spirit.

Of all the people involved, who is displaying love, joy,

peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control? Who is speaking life into and through the situation?

This was an excellent starting point. These questions brought immediate clarity and relief. The angst over who was right and who was wrong diminished. Replaced by peace knowing that those who chose to be led by the Spirit would come to the right conclusions.

Step 2: Clarify Boundaries

Now ... I had to move forward with creating boundaries. Though step #1 allowed me to see the situation more clearly, I still can't control the actions of others. I can only control my own actions and the situations I allow myself to be in. I knew I had to have some hard conversations with my leader. So I mustered the courage to tell her that I no longer wanted to be her confidant. If her thoughts were not to be shared with her direct leaders, then I didn't want her to share them with me either. I expressed my distinct value and honor for her position as my boss, but I simply wasn't capable of being a 'safe place' for her to express her frustration any longer.

The whole thing felt like I was choosing sides. And I guess I was. I was choosing the side that was fruitful. The conversation itself seemed like climbing Mt. Everest. But on the other side, it was the best move I could have made.

Step 3: Trust God

It sounds so cliché. But it's true. I didn't have all the information. There were major aspects about what was happening that I didn't know—things I didn't need to know. I just needed to trust. Trust that the same God that's at work in me is also at work in those around me. Trust that those who are yielded to Him will make the right decision for everyone involved.

Trusting God isn't blind faith or dismissive abdication. It's boldly choosing to leave the results in far more capable hands than your own.

Gina McClain is a speaker, writer and children's ministry director at Faith Promise Church in Knoxville, Tenn.

For the original article, visit