

9 High-Impact Leadership Lessons from 2020

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What a year! It has been:

- Over-flowing with difficult challenges.
- Packed with good opportunities.
- Flooded with tough disappointment.
- Brimming with adaptation.
- Full of hope!

You made it through! Now what? Your outcomes in 2021 will largely be based on what you learned and how you grew in 2020. There will be those who tell you in January that “2020 isn’t over yet.” That won’t be true. When 2020 is over, it’s over. If you don’t think that way, you can get stuck there.

Yes, we’ll have new challenges to solve in 2021, but let them be new. Come at them with a fresh approach. Think about how much more you know because of COVID-19 than you did last March and April. It’s staggering. Your new knowledge affects how you live, think, and make decisions.

- How much more do you know about yourself and your leadership?
- What did you learn about the truth of God?
- What changes will you make in your daily life?

One of my significant insights from 2020 is that I just don’t think big enough, and I’m going to change that. It’s ironic when I consider all the big thinkers, I’ve been around for such a long time; I should be better at it by now... but I’m fired up to see what progress I can make!

I’m confident that *2021 will require* me to think bigger. **What new thing will 2021 require of you?** Here are some of the top leadership lessons from 2020 that may help your growth and process of change.

9 Leadership Lessons from 2020:

1) Conversation beats debate.

An honest and passionate conversation with differing views is healthy if all persons involved seek to learn and improve. However, debate usually requires someone to be right and

someone to be wrong, a winner and a loser. That rarely ends up in the best possible situation.

A productive conversation is an opportunity to understand the other points of view and end up with a better or best outcome because the conversation took place. Another good test is to compare the quality of the relationships before the conversation and after. If the relationships are better after, you did a good job.

2) It's easy to submit to fear over faith.

Through much of 2020, my faith conquered any fears related to COVID-19. But there were times, usually, when bombarded by negative news, that fear crept in and crowded faith out. That happens easier than you might think.

When you are continually solving problems, helping people, and fatigued, fear can find its way in when your faith would normally carry you through. When your internal battery is low, your resistance to fear drops as well.

I'm not suggesting that a position of faith over fear dismisses the reality of COVID. It's real, and it's serious. There are three practical things that help your faith win over fear:

- Get the rest you need.
- Quit listening to all the negative. (Find a couple of sources you can count on.)
- When you sense fear creeping in, talk about it with a trusted friend.

3) You don't have to know the future to lead into it.

The most common theme I've heard from leaders this year, by far, is the perceived inability to lead toward the future when we have no idea what's around the corner. The truth is, you did lead.

It wasn't easy, and you may have felt like you took more hits than made progress, but you made it this far. You know a lot more than you did nine months ago, and you are now better equipped to lead forward. You still don't know everything that will happen in the next six months, but that's not really a new thing, and you do know enough to take the next best steps.

That's a good strategy for now. When you can't see around the corner, cast vision for shorter periods of time, if it doesn't work as planned, adapt, and go again!

4) Values must always supersede pressure.

There are many possible examples; here's one. If a financial shortfall gets large enough, you might allow that pressure to override, for example, your value of generosity. Enough pressure can do that to even the best of leaders.

What you've always believed and practiced can get crowded out because sustained pressure changes how you think and make decisions. Hold true to your values. This begins with knowing your values at a convictional level and is enhanced with accountability from your team.

5) People are hungry for a spirit of optimism and hope.

People became increasingly discouraged as they heard continual predictions of bad things to come. There will always be big problems to solve, that's what leaders do, and we must lead with hope and belief that they are solvable.

I remember the first time I locked eyes with another leader this past Spring and said, "You know, we're *going* to get through this." It stopped him in his tracks. That's all he needed. He tapped back into what he knew to be true.

It wasn't pie in the sky, and I didn't pretend to have all the answers; I just know we're going to make it to the other side. People need to hear that over and over again. Your optimistic view of the future is critical to your leadership. Keep in mind; optimism doesn't mean without problems; it means there will be solutions.

6) Joy is a choice.

Some might attempt to steal your joy, and life can throw tough things your way, but here are three helpful sources of joy:

- **Gratitude.**
When you're genuinely grateful for all you have, you feel blessed and a sense of joy within.
- **The Holy Spirit.**
God's Spirit promises a deep and abiding sense of inner joy that is always available to you.
- **First things first.**
Joy comes from doing hard things first, for the right reasons, to benefit others.

7) Resilience is a game-changer.

Here's a short excerpt from a recent post.

2020 is a year in which it's easy to give up, and that's different than quitting."

Far too many leaders have given up, resigned in their hearts, but still go to work every day. They go through the motions but have no resilience to bounce back from the tough stuff that life throws their way. Resilience is like a leaders' superpower. Part of your success is that you just keep going; you don't give up."

8) Adaptability is crucial for progress to be achieved.

2020 has been a year of continually adapting to the rapid changes around us. Adaptability has been essential to navigating this season of crisis, and it's a core component to continued success in leadership.

You might pivot and change because you just don't have a choice. But the best way to accept the challenge of a difficult situation and leverage the opportunity for the best results is to personally adapt to what is happening around you.

Continually think, innovate, experiment, and improve. And always include measuring the success of each endeavor by how much progress you made toward the vision.

9) Inner peace is not based on what you can control.

Under stress, we attempt to control more than usual to compensate for the inability to actually control anything of substance. The more you attempt to control what you cannot control, the more peace will elude you.

In fact, we unknowingly attempt to control little things, which robs our peace even more because, at some level, we know that doesn't really change anything for good.

Soul level peace that produces a non-anxious presence comes from knowing that God is in control and our job as leaders is to focus on what we can change, not fret about what we can't change.

The peace we all long for, even in stressful times, is a result of letting go, not grasping tightly. That doesn't mean you don't care; it merely acknowledges that peace is a state of being, not about possession or achievement.