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## INTRODUCTION

# TRANSFORMATIVE RESILIENT LEADERSHIP DEFINED

Leadership in the best of times is challenging. Leadership in crisis is harder still. But there is a third type of leadership that must certainly be the most challenging of all—one that seizes upon adversity and even crisis as an opportunity for transformation and growth. Imagine a leader who can practice transformative leadership anchored in growth-promoting resilience that propels people, organizations, and even communities to greater heights than before, greater heights than perhaps imagined. Imagine the leader who can not only lead to bounce back but foster quantum leaps forward from the abyss of crisis is a rare person, indeed. “The moment [such a leader] takes the helm, order, promptitude and confidence follow as the necessary result. When we see such results, we know that a hero leads” Wanted A Leader, 1861, p. 4).

*Leadership* is the ability to influence or guide others. It is the force that harnesses and shapes social energy into a social force. *Transformative resilient leadership* is our term to describe those crisis leadership behaviors that foster organizational, community, and personal growth in the wake of adversity. It guides through the “fog of crisis” with the promise of a better future. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies (IOM, 2013) wrote that highly effective leaders can increase resilience to stressful conditions



and may even lead to the creation of an entire culture of resilience that radiates to all aspects of the organization, and perhaps the community, as well. We believe that with the right leadership, crisis can create a “tipping point” that leads to such change. Transformative crisis leadership combines guidance and spirit to not only heal but also evolve the culture forward with the strength of resilience and growth.

There are books on leadership. There are books on crisis. There are books on resilience. This book uses research on all three topics to present a model of transformative resilient leadership. Transformative resilient leadership includes five prominent *pillars*, or characteristics. These pillars are found in the “classics” of modern leadership theory as well as in our own research. Transformative resilient leaders possess and deploy

- a clear *vision*, which mitigates the negative impact of the crisis at hand and leverages the community, organizational, and individual strengths to grow;
- *decisiveness* in their decision-making processes;
- *effective communication* that conveys this vision and direction to empower the collective for growth;
- *supportive relationships* to not only withstand individual and collective stress but act as a catalyst for growth; and
- *integrity* that underlies all leadership actions.

This book is written by a teacher (Dr. Everly) and his former student (Dr. Athey), who reconnected 20 years after their initial introduction to build an innovative resilience-based program for a large state university. Yes, the pandemic can bring about connection. Written from this unique combination of perspectives, our team taps the expertise of a public health scholar and disaster psychologist (Dr. Everly) whose 48-year career has involved travel to 39 countries



on six continents and consisted of cofounding and codirecting for-profit health care organizations as well as a United Nations-affiliated nonprofit organization. Additionally, we have the experience of a former collegiate All-American basketball player (Dr. Athey) who went on to become a national leading sport and performance psychologist, a high-ranking university administrator, and a performance psychologist for elite special warfare operators.

Over the past 4 decades, we have each researched and written about the signs indicating that an organization or group possesses an organizational culture of resilience. Shared aspirations and goals that are clearly defined and easily measured are essential for the collective group. Resilient organizations demonstrate reciprocal support and collaboration among members. Think of it as a Three Musketeers “one for all and all for one” approach. There is also an attitude of “no one left behind” in a crisis. There is a collaborative interdependency, wherein the success of the individual is intertwined with the overall success of the organization, and success is maximized through collaboration. Additionally, the members of the organization possess shared values in terms of how the organization’s goals should be achieved, and there exists a high degree of cohesion. *Cohesion* is the degree to which there exists a social affinity of members for other members and leadership. There is an esprit de corps characterized by mutual respect and trust among members and between members and leadership. Last, group members identify with the organization’s “brand.” There is pride associated with membership. Members may even derive some degree of their personal identity from their membership in the group.

Yet, although many group leaders know these factors matter for organizational resilience, they often do not know how to facilitate such transformation. Given this, we have created a prescriptive approach to the practice of transformative resilient leadership.



## DEVELOPING OUR PRESCRIPTIVE APPROACH

Based on work originally done in China, we coauthored a book on resilient leadership in 2010. For the most part, it was a prescriptive book on the leadership characteristics necessary to successfully navigate the fog of crisis and bounce back from adversity. The concepts were refined as the material was taught at the FBI National Academy and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Over a decade later, with the passage of time and exposure to additional national and international adversity, including the COVID-19 pandemic, we felt it was time to look beyond merely bouncing back and to study the lessons learned about leadership aimed at “bouncing forward” to growth and transformation.

Our prescriptions are based on seven contributing elements: (a) a review of the oldest generally accepted classic treatises uniquely written during and about crisis leadership with an implied eye on transformation; (b) a review of selected works from the “golden age of leadership”; (c) our own research on presidential leadership in crisis from which tremendous transformations to American society ultimately arose; (d) the science of human resilience; (e) insights from recent discoveries in neuroscience; (f) exclusive interviews with some of the most noteworthy transformative leaders within their respective industries (and of whom you’ve probably never heard); and (g) the authors’ direct observations of and research into the critical periods of uncertainty or adversity that have served as milestones for the last 50 years of Western history and that are greatly influencing our future, including the London Blitz, the domestic terrorism in Oklahoma City, the first Gulf War, the attack on the World Trade Center and the attacks of September 11, 2001, the SARS pandemic, the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Hurricane Katrina, and the COVID-19 pandemic. From these experiences and more, the most salient lessons of transformative resilient leadership have been derived and distilled in this volume.



## RESEARCH SUPPORTING OUR APPROACH: LESSONS FROM “THE HARDEST JOB IN THE WORLD”

John Steinbeck (1966) wrote, “We give the President more work to do than a man can do, more responsibility than a man should take, more pressure than a man can bear” (p. 46). Arguably, the study of American presidential leadership serves as a virtual proxy for all leadership roles but especially leadership under stress and adversity. The title of John Dickerson’s (2020) *New York Times* best-selling book says it all: *The Hardest Job in the World: The American Presidency*. Dickerson made the case that the American president must be executive-, commander-, first responder-, and consoler-in-chief, in addition to being an “action hero.” Dickerson concluded that the president must integrate and handle a wider variety of experiences than perhaps any other leader on the planet. Arguably, the study of American presidential leadership serves as a virtual proxy for all leadership roles but especially leadership under stress and adversity. The study of presidential leadership can teach powerful lessons about effectiveness and ineffectiveness in times of crisis.

So we decided to use presidential leadership as a proxy for leadership effectiveness overall, and especially as a proxy for resilience-focused crisis leadership. We found an exceptionally vast, robust survey of leadership experts that not only supports our model of the five pillars but also shows that resilience through adversity is viewed as the most critical determinant of overall leadership effectiveness.

Under the auspices of C-SPAN, a consensus panel of leadership experts was convened to identify core factors that predicted overall leadership effectiveness. The report was published over numerous years, most recently in 2021. The panel identified 10 core factors predictive of presidential leadership effectiveness (referred to as “the hardest job in the world”), but we believe they generalize to most leadership positions. The 10 core factors of leadership that CSPAN identified were: communication and public persuasion,



crisis leadership, economic/financial management, moral authority, international relations, administrative skills, relations with oversight or collaboration bodies, vision/agenda setting, pursuit of equal justice for all, and performance. We were curious as to the influence of these diverse variables. Understanding that these core elements were not equally predictive of overall leadership effectiveness, they were statistically analyzed and weighted as to their importance or overall predictive value. Of the 10 core elements of leadership, leadership in times of adversity and crisis was the most powerful predictor of overall leadership effectiveness when comparing the highest to the lowest performers (Hirdes et al., 2021). So we see that effectively leading through adversity not only resonates psychologically, it appears to be a critical empirical determinant of overall leadership effectiveness.

Everly et al. (2013) analyzed the C-SPAN presidential leadership surveys released in 2000 and 2009 (CSPAN, 2000, 2009). We discovered that four factors, or what we refer to as “pillars,” predicted overall leadership effectiveness. Our analyses yielded evidence that the most important and universally applicable leadership behaviors were (a) performance, what we refer to as decisiveness and action; (b) vision/agenda, what we refer to as an actively optimistic vision; (c) moral authority, what we refer to as a moral compass; and (d) public persuasion, what we refer to as effective communications.

C-SPAN replicated its survey in 2017, and we analyzed the combined results of this replicated survey and the two previous surveys (Everly et al., 2020). Using presidential leadership as a proxy for leadership in challenging situations, we contrasted the highest performing presidents against the lowest performing presidents, overall. We sought to identify the characteristics that best differentiated the two groups of presidents. We found the same four factors significant discriminators of high versus low presidential leadership



effectiveness *overall* as assessed by C-SPAN's experts on leadership: (a) performance, (b) vision/agenda, (c) moral authority, and (d) public persuasion. A follow-up analysis of those data with the addition of C-SPAN's 2021 analysis caused us to add (e) fostering supportive relationships as a fifth pillar.

Can we now extend these findings of overall presidential leadership to crisis leadership? A final analysis of C-SPAN data (Everly & Athey, 2022; Everly et al., 2020) was conducted focusing just on crisis leadership based upon their report. We compared presidents who were highly effective leading during crises within their presidencies to presidents who largely failed to effectively lead during crises that existed during their terms in office. Let's look at the results:

Abraham Lincoln was rated by C-SPAN as the most effective crisis leader for his leadership during the American Civil War. He had a vision for a united country. He acted boldly and decisively. He was an expert communicator. He sought collaboration, even with his rivals, as documented by Doris Kearns Goodwin (2005) in her book *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. He was guided by a moral compass, even if his inclinations were unpopular.

George Washington was rated the second most effective crisis leader for his transformative crisis leadership during the American Revolution. Washington's vision for a new country was unparalleled, especially considering his refusal to be anointed "king" or accept a status of "president for life" when both were offered (a decision that prompted King George of England to call him the greatest man on earth). His bold decision making was courageous. On December 25–26, 1776, Washington's army famously crossed the Delaware River and attacked roughly 1,400 troops Hessian troops camped around Trenton, New Jersey. His army was in desperate need of a significant victory over the British to bolster failing morale. The Delaware River was choked with ice, they were amid a



winter storm, and the attack was delayed by 3 hours. Nevertheless, Washington persevered, and the attack was a success. Some argue this was a significant turning point in the war, as it showed the Americans to be capable of bold and unconventional action. As for moral authority, none of the “founding fathers” even approached his stature.

As for Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR), his skills as a crisis communicator were without equal, except by Winston Churchill. But armed with more than words, he too acted boldly and courageously. He inherited a potentially catastrophic financial crisis from Herbert Hoover. Within the first days of his presidency, he risked impeachment by shutting down and “rebooting” the entire financial system of the United States. His famous radio “fireside chats” were initiated on a national level to inform and reassure his nation as they navigated through the Great Depression and World War II. As a direct result of the crises in his presidency, he established the foundations for a series of initiatives and programs that continue to improve life in the United States even today. Among those programs are the Farm Credit Administration, the Export–Import Bank, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), the National Labor Relations Board, the Rural Utility Service (formerly the Rural Electrification Administration), the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the Social Security Administration (SSA), and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

Finally, Theodore Roosevelt achieved that which had been deemed impossible. In 1902, he quelled the national mining strike that was paralyzing the entire country. In doing so, he engineered a resolution that satisfied mine owners, boosted the economy, returned a primary heat source to consumers, and gave new legitimacy to the nascent organized labor movement. In addition, understanding the ecological importance of his country’s natural resources and a prescient eye to the future, Roosevelt initiated the national parks



system. We can thank him for the preservation of beautiful natural resources we enjoy today.

As for the least effective crisis leaders, the C-SPAN studies identified three presidents as consistently the worst. James Buchanan was judged the most ineffective presidential crisis leader in American history for his failures to address the issues of slavery and secession. One month after he left office, the Civil War began. What were his failures? Buchanan failed to take the bold actions necessary to address the inhumanity of slavery and the potential dissolution of the Union threatened by Southern secession. Whether it was a lack of vision, indifference, or a lack of courage is unclear.

Andrew Johnson was rated the second least effective crisis leader. Johnson wanted a rapid restoration of the seceded Southern states to the Union but without protection for former slaves. This led to him becoming the first American president to be impeached. While he was acquitted by the Senate, it was by just a single vote. What were his failures? He acted without a forward-thinking vision informed by an understanding of history. He was willing to virtually ignore Lincoln's abhorrence of slavery and his subsequent legislative legacy in the form of the Emancipation Proclamation, as well as the fact that over 110,000 Union troops died in part to eradicate slavery. He acted without serious consideration for potential rapprochement through political coalitions.

Last, Franklin Pierce was rated the third least effective crisis leader by C-SPAN. Pierce, who preceded Buchanan, believed that the movement to abolish slavery was a threat to the unity and stability of the United States. In 1854, he signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act and was a supporter of the Fugitive Slave Act. Both actions further divided the nation and led to violent uprisings that foreshadowed the American Civil War. What were his failures? A remarkable lack of vision and a lack of courage to act boldly



seemed to plague Pierce. According to the National Constitution Center (NCC Staff, 2021),

The *New York Herald* marked his death with the following blunt statement: The ‘deceased was a man of something more than average ability. He possessed, however, none of the attributes of greatness, and was more of a cautious, studious, and watchful politician than a comprehensive, far-seeing, or observant statesman.’ (para. 2)

The actions of all three of these presidents selected by C-SPAN experts as the least effective crisis leaders are characteristic of short-sightedness, indecision, caution, and a general disregard for the consequences of their action or inaction.

The results of our analysis of the C-SPAN crisis leadership survey revealed five crisis leadership “pillars”: (a) having a vision for success; (b) decisiveness in bringing that vision (mission) to life; (c) creating an environment of open, honest communications; (d) relationship formation; and (e) following a moral compass. These pillars clearly differentiated the most effective crisis leaders (Lincoln, Washington, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Theodore Roosevelt) from the least effective crisis leaders (Buchanan, Johnson, and Pierce). While these findings are not definitive and are certainly subject to interpretation and debate, we find they add further support for our model and are consistent with both the “classical” lessons of history as well as the “modern classics” on effective leadership in crisis.

## WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS BOOK

In the corporate world, the “art of the turnaround,” wherein a leader can snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, is one of the most valued of all leadership qualities. But perhaps there are universal lessons to be distilled from the sources enumerated above about



bouncing back, bouncing forward, and even becoming a psychological promontory that resists the erosive forces of adversity. Whether it's a sports team, a business, a community, or even the way you live your life, there are recurring themes that predict success and serve as lessons for us all. This book describes those lessons and offers the stories of those leaders who have lived them.

Chapters 1 through 4 lay the foundation for our story by reviewing the most relevant classical and modern history, the science of human resilience, and principles of neuroscience as they apply to crisis leadership.

Chapters 5 through 9 describe the five pillars (characteristics) of transformative resilient leadership. Each chapter includes a simple self-assessment that allows you to assess and continually monitor your actions in each of these critical leadership domains. Throughout the book, we also highlight numerous profiles in transformative resilient leadership. Most of these are based upon exclusive interviews conducted with prime exemplars of transformative resilient leadership who have literally transformed their respective industries on national and international levels. In their own words, they give us concrete examples of how they shaped their organizations and industries fueled by adversity.

We would be remiss if we did not challenge and bring discussion to individual foundation elements of performance in the wake of stressful events: wellness. Chapter 10 briefly reviews the significance of self-care for the resilient crisis leader. Leaders are performers. And, at the end of the day, whether it is an acute response in crisis or sustaining high performance over time, leaders cannot perform if they are not well.

Finally, there is a brief action agenda for the transformative resilient leader to use to help launch and subsequently guide the employment of core prescriptive principles: The 10 Pillars of Transformative Resilient Leadership.



We sincerely believe that when you reach the end of this book, not only will you understand transformative resilient leadership, but you will also be empowered to apply its principles. This book can empower CEOs, frontline managers, directors, teachers, coaches, parents, leaders of any kind, as well as those who study and aspire to any position of leadership, to create a *culture of resilience*.