

Shock and Aftershock

Living the Legacy of 9/11

By Marc Trezza

As business people, too often we think of our lives as lacking “greatness.” Sometimes we feel a lack of value in our day-to-day existence. Shouldn’t there be more? When I’ve achieved so much of what I thought I wanted, why am I not enjoying this more? What is wrong with me? Why can’t I sleep? Why doesn’t my life feel like it has meaning?

Far more than fear, one of the emotional difficulties many have faced, post-9/11, is a feeling of inadequacy. We want to do something to feel involved, to help and to feel better about ourselves. Facing part survivor-guilt, part empathy for those who have suffered so terribly and part anger against the enemy that perpetrated the slaughter, many feel the need to do something. Unfortunately, few have the direct mechanism or means to fulfill that need.

One of the benefits of being a New Yorker is that it’s easy to find something to do. Some people have been cooking for their local firehouses, some deliver food, supplies and other necessities. I worked as a counselor at the 63rd Street Armory to help military personnel who were traumatized by the early carnage of the rescue efforts. People leave

flowers outside police stations and firehouses, and many have donated money. But in a broader sense, while there can be no silver lining, the new sense of community that exists in New York City post-9/11 is a palpable thing. In a way that never existed before, random acts of kindness, an omnipresent sense of tolerance and an overriding feeling of brotherhood characterize daily interaction in the city. Participating in that sense of community helps ease that sense of helplessness, because in a very important way you are doing something. You’re helping to build something of real value out of the ashes of a wanton, immoral act of incomprehensible, maniacal violence.

Carrying suppressed emotions that can rise to the surface without warning, things bring us to tears that pre-9/11 we would simply have thought of as “moving” or “nice.” During the Super Bowl, I was in a room full of people when the Anheuser-Busch commercial came on. When those Clydesdales bowed their heads to the city, every single person in the room had tears running down their face. A year ago, that never would have happened.

For others, it is much more difficult to find meaning or a mechanism for healing. For the business leader suffering from post-9/11 issues, what can be done for those for whom you are responsible or for yourself? Perhaps a concern doesn’t appear directly related to 9/11. What if you’re having trouble coping with a dissatisfaction or malaise that seems to have no specific source? What if it’s your family or your subordinates who are suffering?

As a professional crisis manager, a growing percentage of my business these days is devoted to clients who need coaching on quality of life topics as much as management issues. For business leaders, however, these problems are always intertwined and inseparable. Often, my job is to ask tough questions that most executives don’t have the time or inclination to face themselves:

- What does it mean to be a success as a human being?
- How do the best leaders act when the onslaught facing them seems overwhelming?
- How do we tap into greatness in the face of fear, panic or despair?

Peace does not come from the avoidance of conflict. It comes from the ability to cope.

Death is certainly the most clearly definable catalyst for deep introspection. When the shock of death hits the survivors, profound, hidden truths are often revealed. These are truths that usually lie beneath the surface, suppressed to avoid the intense anxiety that they can unleash. Not only can death overwhelm us with feelings of vulnerability and helplessness, it also forces us to face our freedom, because freedom carries with it accountability and responsibility. This leads to self-examination, which often forces us to face our failures, feelings of inadequacy, certain behaviors we are not proud of, etc.

These realizations can either be debilitating or inspiring. Some people will wallow in self-recrimination, guilt and depression. Others will become inspired to change, forging a commitment to make life better for themselves and those around them. In a real sense, those who did not suffer a direct loss are not reacting so much to the disaster itself as to the unrealized potential that their own lives were before the terror. This wake-up call can be the catalyst that drives you to never allow life to be anything less than great. As business leaders, we should celebrate both the art of business and the art of life.

It's much like the martial arts principles that deal with fear. The untrained, when facing terrible fear, will often succumb to the fear, crumbling inward. The trained martial artist or soldier will control the fear and redirect it into explosive energy directed back at the source of the fear. The more frightened they are, the more dangerous they become.

The same principle applies to disturbing self-realizations, depression and any other negative emotions that leave you feeling lost, inadequate, guilty or afraid. For a business leader, ultimately, it comes down to the necessity for genuine leadership. Ask yourself:

- Am I an ethical, honorable person, first and foremost, always and without exception?
- What have I done wrong in my life?

- What must I now do right?
- What have we done wrong as a team, as an organization and as a family?
- What must we now do right?

Perhaps the greatest lesson is that we have not appreciated enough, that we have not cared enough for our neighbor, that we have allowed competition to destroy our compassion and we have become critical instead of kind.

Something important has happened to you and your community, and it is your responsibility to make the most of it and not return to a "normal" life. This is the legacy of those we have lost, and it is our responsibility to protect that legacy. We must take the time to redefine ourselves and how we work. The first step I take if these are issues facing a client is to talk about them. Then I have them write a new work-life description. We discuss it, revise it and develop tactical plans on how to make it work. The revision becomes an oath—a conversion. We work toward a promise that they will become who they were meant to be. That is your greatest responsibility to yourself and to everyone around you. It is the post-9/11 resolution.

But how can we do that? In martial arts, the way to transcend karma lies in the proper use of the mind and the will. The oneness of all life is a truth that can be fully realized only when false notions of a separate self, whose destiny can be considered apart from the whole, are forever annihilated. Many people began to recognize this connection for the first time, when they became profoundly affected emotionally by the events of 9/11, even though they were not affected directly. Feeling a bond with lives and events thousands of miles away created a sense of awareness of a connection to the "whole" of life. Many people experienced this awareness for the first time.

The aim of art is to project an inner vision out into the world. An artist's expression is his soul made apparent. Behind every motion, the music of your soul is visible. Art is not a decoration or embellishment; it is a work of enlightenment, defined by complete mastery

of technique developed through the reflection and emanation of your soul. We must make "living" an art. Success truly is a journey, not a destination.

To live clear and simple, one must live by an unbreakable code of honor. Authentic leadership means that you do not succumb to the temptations of a weak ego that will lure you to use your position to take advantage simply because you can. Management by fear or coercion is a failure of leadership. Integrity cannot ever be compromised. Honor and integrity are more important than life. Those who value life above all things will sacrifice their honor to save their skins leaving a dishonorable, empty shell. The same applies to those who value money more than honor.

If emotional control is not mastered, at critical moments in a conflict you will lose your edge. A poor attitude or weak self-control can result in an onslaught of anxiety and loss of focus. According to Murphy, this will of course happen at the least opportune time. You must work to develop your *will*. The will to behave with honor must be as constant as the will to win. It means that no amount of punishment, no amount of effort, no condition is too tough to take in order to achieve honorable victory. That is the attitude toward life one must attain. Drive yourself longer, harder and faster than required, all the time. Ordinary effort will not tap or release the tremendous potential stored in your mind and body. Extraordinary effort, combined with highly emotionalized conditions and true determination to win, are the ingredients necessary to achieve greatness in any endeavor.

To be a leader is to be awake and alert, striving to do better at all times. One can never be the master of one's self unless all psychological hindrances are removed. To be a leader is to master both strategic and tactical thinking, especially under tension and stress.

Answering the difficult questions is the first task of a leader, followed by direct, focused, committed action. Perhaps Harvard's Peter Koestenbaum said it best: "Unless the distant goals of meaning,



greatness, and destiny are addressed, we can't make an intelligent decision about what to do tomorrow morning—much less set the long-term strategy for a company.”

Whether facing the onslaught of seemingly endless business challenges or a threat to your very existence, inner peace does not come from the avoidance of conflict. It comes from the ability to cope. Inner peace and self-confidence therefore go hand in hand. This is the exact opposite of paranoia or hysteria. I'm not talking about living your life with a siege mentality. I'm talking about living a long, full, peaceful life because you have developed confidence in the knowledge that you can and will handle whatever nasty little turn life may hand you. The reality is, as a result, that life is less likely to hand one to you at all. Your emotional health, the safety of your business and the security of your family are too important to leave to chance. You cannot enjoy life if you live it afraid or ashamed.

A true leader is one with the self-discipline to adhere to exceptional personal values and whose actions are consistent with those values. Effective leaders do not exhibit character flaws that hurt their organization, such as indecision, deceit, cowardice and selfishness. Because role models are the foundation of culture, nothing sends a clearer message to employees about you than your behavior. Too many employees have seen executives say one thing and do another so often that they've become jaundiced and cynical about any announcement or policy that comes from “on high.” If your words and actions are not consistent, trust is impossible. If as a leader you say that it's critical to listen to clients, but you never make time to meet with any, your employees will ignore them as well. Talk is cheap. The best way to prove your leadership is not to talk about it, but set the example.

For a business to thrive, the morale of your company must be excellent. Therefore, an essential part of leadership must be motivation, for the morale of any

organization begins at the top. The CEO is the trigger of the organization's spirit. Particularly in an economy as competitive as ours, how is it that so many CEOs ignore the clear and direct correlation between employee morale, competitive performance and client satisfaction? Clients are the first to feel the effects of poor leadership in your organization. It doesn't matter whether the problems are consolidation integration issues, a failure to build and maintain a successful sales force, cost-cutting or not knowing how to overcome a ruthless competitor willing to slash fees, trash your reputation and steal your people. Clients don't care about your internal problems and they certainly don't expect to pay for you to fix them.

If there are problems, you must first look within yourself to see if there is anything you have done incorrectly, then look at those who report directly to you, then look down the management chain. The last place you should look for the root cause of any problem is at the employees, because the strengths and weaknesses of any organization flow from the top down.

Realize that having courage means not only the willingness to take risks but also that you have the courage to do what is ethically right. To achieve and sustain success, you must work ceaselessly on your own character. Listen well to others and seek their counsel. Seek assistance and advice from outside experts who can look objectively at the challenges you face and who can coach and advise you to help put these principles into action. This is the final step in becoming a master strategist—implementation of an all-encompassing methodology and approach that will drive your organization to excel, enhance your life and reap rich personal rewards for you and your family.

Live the legacy of 9/11. Commit to do the necessary things that you hate so that others will be inspired to do the necessary things that they hate. Make it your business to live the highest standards of competence, conduct and performance. Commit to

sustain the strength to attack your own faults and overcome them. Learn to thrive in adversity. Be determined that the harsh reality of business battle will give you the enthusiasm for personal growth and the will to be physically and mentally strong to meet the demanding situations and challenges your company encounters.

It is a truth known to all good leaders that even corporations have a soul. The business that has no soul will eventually cease to exist and the success of a company or corporation turns on the kind of soul it possesses. The core values of your organization reflect the core values of its leader. More than ever, we need exceptional leaders. It's not just about business. It's about our nation, our freedom and the protection of those things we value. It's about honor and respect for those who lost their lives when our enemy picked them to represent us all, and for those who continue to put themselves in harm's way to protect us every day in nameless places in every corner of the globe.

Adversity is the breeding ground of greatness. Living the legacy of 9/11 is about committing with the spirit of a warrior to a great offensive to protect and save our soul—as individuals, as corporations and as a nation. **CM**

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