

## Leadership in a Time of Uncertainty

I write this article without knowing what the next few weeks and months will entail given COVID-19. With each passing day, the volume of confirmed cases within the United States grows rapidly, resulting in increased measures being taken throughout the county to stem the expansion of the virus. On one end of the spectrum, local and state governments are advocating that companies encourage their employees to work from home, while others are going further by ordering the closure of bars and restaurants and issuing shelter in place orders. Put simply, these are unprecedented times—times where true leaders are needed to put the public at ease and provide much-needed direction amongst the chaos. These leaders, if successful, will be admired for their skills, and over time, mimicked and celebrated.

While I still consider myself young—I turned 39 in March—I have been fortunate to witness some truly great leaders and some not so successful ones as well. In my opinion, the consistent traits great leaders exhibit include their ability to: (1) remain calm and slow down when everyone else is panicking and speeding up; (2) exhibit awareness of their own weaknesses and blind-spots; (3) deliver messages clearly and concisely (even to the point of oversimplification and overcommunication, if necessary); (4) engage others in the decision making process; (5) make prudent decisions even when there are insufficient facts to know the outcome; (6) and arguably most importantly, true leaders are individuals of incredible integrity—integrity that is built upon a foundation of moral principles.

Effective leaders are individuals who understand that people want to be led with confidence and honesty, especially during uncertain times when limited information is available. Take for example a platoon leader whose platoon is caught in the middle of a firefight without knowledge as to which direction to go. This leader must proceed with making a decision knowing full well that the decision will lead to saving lives and perhaps losing others, because failing to make a decision at all will result in the loss of all lives.

To make this point further, President Abraham Lincoln, one of our nation's greatest leaders, who is well known for exhibiting the above characteristics, led our country through one of its darkest hours with no guarantee or ability to control the outcome. Fortunately, however, because of Lincoln's remarkable ability to remain calm and communicate his goals to the country in a simple and concise manner he was able to hold the union together.

The Louisville Bar Association (LBA) has benefited from great leaders beginning with Edward J. McDermott, the association's founder, and James S. Pirtle, the LBA's first president in 1900. The impact of their leadership, and those who followed them, can be felt throughout our organization and our community. Given the circumstances of today, the LBA, our community, and our country need similar strong leaders. Therefore, I ask that every member of our organization do what they can to support their fellow members and the organization.

Furthermore, while I don't consider myself to be a great leader—not yet anyway—I promise to try and exhibit as many of the traits identified above

as possible when called upon to lead the organization through these uncertain times. There is no doubt the organization will face difficult programmatic and financial choices ahead, such as whether to hold previously planned CLE programs, receptions, and the Summer Law Institute and there is no guarantee that the right decisions will be made. The LBA's membership, however, should take comfort in knowing that every decision will be made with forethought and a commitment to integrity. By way of example, as of the date of writing this article, the executive

committee in consultation with Scott Furkin, the executive director, elected to close the Bar Center until at least April 6th in order to ensure the safety and health of the LBA's staff who make everything possible.

Finally, a message for our community at large. In today's ever-changing environment, uncertainty reigns supreme. Therefore, family, friends, co-workers, fellow attorneys and members of the LBA are scrambling for guidance and direction. As a result, I challenge each of you to consider the attributes identified with strong leadership and to exemplify as many of them as you can so you can contribute to the patchwork of leadership our community and country needs. Please know leadership takes many different forms.

Whether your gift is to simply be an ear for a friend who is worried, or you are responsible for managing your law firm's work from home policies, you can have a positive impact on those you interact with, especially if you slow down and communicate in a simple and concise manner.

In addition, it is important to both listen and engage others (all ideas are made better by thoughtful discourse with mentors, friends and colleagues) and to know when to make a decision. Be mindful of your weaknesses and partner with others who complement your skills so that your company or organization benefits from your collective guidance. And, don't ever forget to live a life of integrity.

In closing, COVID-19 will eventually pass, and people will respect those who provided strong leadership, direction and support. Don't ever forget we are all people and sometimes a willingness to just listen and be there for one another is all that is needed. True leaders get this and do it effortlessly. Go be a leader, the LBA, our community, our country needs you.



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Sincerely,

Peter H. Wayne IV  
LBA President