

LEADERSHIP insights
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Upcoming Leadership Workshops

November 23 – **Manage Stress Before It Manages You** *NOW VIRTUAL ONLY!*

November 30 – **Connecting the Dots Through Emotional Intelligence** *NOW VIRTUAL ONLY!*

January 28 – **Conflict: Building Trust through Skillful Conversations** *NOW VIRTUAL ONLY!*

February 19 – **Walk the Talk: Leadership Accountability**
** May be held virtually - TBD*

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Center. Enter. Add Value.

Have you had any experience lately passionately disagreeing with someone? Yeah, me too. It is easy to talk about important issues with the people whose support we know we have, but it's sort of like our social media newsfeed: a digitally manufactured echo chamber of our own beliefs, little risk involved. But as a leader you will encounter situations where you have serious disagreement, so **becoming skilled at difficult discussions is a leadership imperative.** There is no time like the present to practice it.

Imagine you are getting ready to talk with a colleague about masks and social distancing. This person views it from a completely different viewpoint than you do. Heart racing yet? Let's look at a tool from The Zen Leader: Ways to Go from Barely Managing to Leading Fearlessly by Ginny Whitelaw to help with that: ***"Center. Enter. Add Value."***

CENTER. You may groan if you wish at my use of the term "center," expecting some new age-y connotation, but bear with me for a minute. People who chant "ohm," people who say a prayer, who take a deep breath, who simply give themselves a little pep talk before a difficult situation are all doing the same thing: centering. The term refers to quieting our mental distractions and cooling down our emotions. It helps to prevent some people from saying things they will regret and encourage others to speak up when something is important. Without conscious centering it is easy to get high-jacked by our emotions, but as uniquely stated by Rollin McCraty of the Heart Math Institute, *"We have a lot more control over our emotional diet choices than we realize."* We are passionate about our beliefs, but we have to manage that passion so that it doesn't derail us, and centering practices are where we start. Before you start that mask (or any difficult) conversation, center yourself by:

- Breathing, which of course you already are doing. Just do it more deeply, slowly. Exhale ALL of the air so that you can inhale fully. Do this kind of breathing 3 times, holding the breath for a moment at the top of the inhale; with each exhale, see if you can slow it down even more.
- Identifying and writing down a larger purpose. *What do you want even more than being right?* What if you and your arch rival actually had something in common and you could articulate it, repeating as needed when emotions rise back up?
- Bringing awareness to your body of the difference between relaxation and tension. Simulate these two states by raising your shoulders up to your ears and tensing all your facial muscles for a moment, then release it with a sigh. Do this a couple of times to really notice the felt sense of each. The easing of that tension is what you are going for, a much clearer place from which to…

ENTER. Go all in with a willingness to be present. Set aside sides, and aim to flow with whatever comes up. Enter with curiosity, like you are trying to learn something new or solve an interesting puzzle.

- Decide to listen, to attend to the other person, to participate fully and respectfully and humbly.
- State your intention, e.g., "My intention here is to have a conversation with you where we *both* can share our concerns and feel heard."
- Seek first to understand. Not my original words, but great words to remember as we enter. We often enter already convinced of what the other person is all about. With our mind made up we might as well not enter. Enter to understand.

ADD VALUE. Some of the value you add will come from what you choose to say, but also in how you choose to respond. Things that you may want to do but which don't add any value: yelling, name-calling, eye rolling, stomping off, shaming, demanding, or psycho-analyzing the other. Engaging in these actions uses up your emotional labor without any return on investment. Things that do add value though:

- Seeing beyond the outward behavior to pain, fear of loss, and needs, you may hear things that you know are true for you too. Perhaps you share desires for freedom, safety, and clarity. Speak those things.
- Genuine negotiation offers can be successful *after* others feel heard, even if there is little to agree upon.
- Ask for what you want from this place.