

A collection of essays for those interested in making a positive difference within their workplace or community in the wake of trauma and crisis. We hope these essays provide new insights, clarify thoughts, and foster plans of action for leaders, employees, and contributors at all levels.

Finding the Strength to Lead in Trying Times

By Robert E. Quinn

Starting Assumptions

1. Leadership occurs when people choose to follow the words and/or actions of a person who acts with purpose and conviction.
2. The "strength" to lead is an emotional resolve—a sureness about (1) what result a person wants to create, (2) why that result is important, and (3) his or her ability to accomplish that result.
3. Trying times deplete individuals' personal strength because people who face trying times have trouble finding meaning in their activities, lose perspective, feel stress and over-focus on immediate problems. These reactions tend to feed back on each other, creating more problems and increasing the intensity of these reactions.
4. A common response in trying times is to look to authority figures for help in creating meaning and providing direction.
5. People in authority positions often suffer as much during trying times as those who are not in authority positions, and therefore find it hard to provide meaning and direction.
6. Anyone can overcome this loss of meaning and purpose, regain personal strength and become a leader in trying times by re-envisioning the result they want to create and changing their behaviors accordingly.

Finding the strength to lead requires us to re-envision the result(s) we want to create and to change our behaviors to better match the new reality.

1. Personal strength begins with re-envisioning the result we want to create and why that result matters. People facing trying times wonder if the work they've been engaged in matters anymore. They feel stress, or even pain. They tend to over-focus on their troubles, and lose their perspective. Asking ourselves what result we want to create—given this new turn in events—helps us to re-create a larger perspective, reduce our stress, increase our energy and find meaning in our work. There are many ways to do this. Here is one possible way:
 - Identify the areas of work and/or life that matter to you. If you are focusing exclusively on work, these may be stakeholders, such as customers, employees, stockholders and the community, or values, such as knowledge generation, innovation or integrity. Examples of "life" include: Marriage/exclusive relationship, Family, Spiritual/Religious, Professional/career, Physical, Social, Financial and Intellectual.
 - Create a matrix. On the left side, label the rows using the categories you just created. On the top, label the columns "short-," "medium-" and "long-term goals."
 - Fill in each cell with goals that describe the results you want to create in each area of work or life. These goals should reflect the things you value most, and the new reality you face in these trying times.
 - If you have done this exercise before, rather than start from scratch, simply re-read the document you created before, and either re-write things based on the new reality you face or add new goals that better match the new reality.
 - If you have the discipline to do this activity (or one like it), it will force you to think about opportunities more than fears, to create rather than to simply react and to be internally-driven rather than externally driven. This will reduce stress and increase energy that you can then use to act in new, creative ways.
2. Personal strength becomes leadership as we change our actions to match the new reality.

Below are stories and concrete examples that illustrate this idea.

Examples of Finding Strength to Lead

Based on an excerpt from *Letters to Garrett: Stories of Change, Power and Possibility*. Robert E. Quinn and Garrett T. Quinn. (Jossey-Bass, 2002).

In times of crisis people tend to struggle to understand who they are in a different world, to feel more tension and less energy, to over-focus on the immediate problem and to lose perspective on their long-term goals and opportunities. These experiences exacerbate each other, making us feel increasingly unable as time goes on. People often look to authority figures for help, but authority figures often face the same struggles as others in crisis. In this document I provide illustrations of how leaders-or a potential leader, given that people do not need to hold formal positions in order to lead-can find the strength to make sense of the situation, decrease tension, increase energy and broaden their perspectives. The stories I share are not as dramatic, or as global in their impact, as the tragedy of September 11. But to the people who experienced them, they were real and painful crises, and the guidelines that I introduced in the previous section apply to people in any trying time-no matter the magnitude. The first story is a professional in a business setting; the second story is a personal one.

The Professional World

Recently a woman in a corporation asked to talk to me privately. We went off to an empty room and sat down. She was the director of marketing. She spoke for a few moments and then tears filled her eyes. She indicated that her predecessor had hired a small army of MBAs. Since her industry was considered very stodgy, and MBAs normally avoid it, his accomplishment in hiring was considered an impressive victory. He received many accolades.

When he left, she replaced him and made an astounding discovery. He succeeded in hiring the MBAs by promising them things that no one could deliver. The MBAs were discovering the lie and now they were all starting to leave. In fact she had just moments before receiving a message informing her that still another MBA had announced he was exiting. She went on to explain that she was worried people would see this as her failure. Yet there was virtually no way to maintain her integrity and yet still keep the MBAs. It was an impossible problem and she was doomed to failure. She went on and on about the difficulty.

Finally I asked her what result she wanted to create. She told me she wanted to keep the MBAs and there was no way to do it. I told her I did not believe that was the result she wanted to create. She looked puzzled. I asked, "Why are you here, what difference do you want to make in this company?" Her eyes lit up. "Oh, I have a clear mission, I want to change the entire culture of this company in that I want to turn it into a customer-centered corporation."

I asked her how she planned to do that and she gave me a thoughtful strategy. I then asked if the MBAs were essential to her strategy. She told me they were. I challenged her again.

"It sounds to me like any bright and committed person could enact the strategic steps you have outlined. What value is added by having an MBA?"

She pondered this for a moment and her countenance began to change. As she became more positive she returned to her problem of credibility. "Won't I lose support if people see me as unable to keep the MBAs?"

"Possibly, is support necessary to the result you want to create?"

"Yes."

"How can you generate support for your purpose?"

"Well, I could make my purpose clear to everyone. In every conversation I could talk about the objective to change the culture. I could also share the strategy and indicate that one thing we learned is that the MBAs do not fit our culture, nor are they necessary to our strategy. My people already sense this and I think other people do as well."

As she spoke, her confidence began to grow. Our conversation went on for another half hour. When we parted, she looked like a different woman. She was clear on her purpose, she had a strategy, her fears were gone and she was ready to take action.

A Personal Story: From Problem Solving to Purpose Finding

One day my wife and I received a phone call from our oldest daughter. Shauri was distraught. She had been growing very serious about a young man, and he had just told her he was not interested in pursuing a romantic relationship. She had emotionally invested in the relationship and now there was only pain. She felt rejected and hurt. She was churning with negative feelings. She announced

she was coming home to recover. When the phone conversation ended, my wife indicated that it was about time I fulfilled my fatherly responsibilities and I was assigned to pick up Shauri at the airport.

The next morning she climbed into the car and immediately started talking about her unfortunate situation. She was flooded with negative emotions and we talked at length about the agony of relationships and attraction. Yet nothing seemed to help. She was in a deep emotional hole and, as she agonized, the hole seemed only to get deeper and darker. Finally I asked her if she was problem solving or purpose finding. The strange question jolted her and she looked at me quizzically.

I suggested that most people live their lives in a reactive mode. They are always trying to solve their problems. Their problems are a source of pain and they want the pain to go away. The problems ebb and flow in intensity but tend to not go away. People are then sad or happy depending on where they are in the ebb and flow. This is very common. It is how normal people live. It is normal to live life in a reactive stance.

Shauri asked what the alternative was. I suggest that instead of being reactors we can be actors, initiators or creators. When we initiate, we tend to eventually create value, and we tend to feel good about ourselves. If we continually clarify our most noble purposes, they become a magnet. We are drawn toward them. No matter what emotions we feel, we begin to pursue our purpose. When we do begin to pursue our purpose, our negative emotions tend to disappear. When we pursue purpose, we experience victory over self and we feel good about who we are. We feel better because we begin to have a more valuable self. We feel empowered and we become empowering to others.

She was not buying it. She ignored me and then spent another fifteen minutes complaining about the unfair nature of life. She paused for a breath and I again asked her if she was problem solving or purpose finding. She ignored my question and went on venting. We repeated this pattern four times. The last time I asked, she stopped talking and just looked at me. I could tell a big challenge was coming. In order to stop my insensitive questions, she asked, "How would I ever use purpose finding in this situation?"

"You can use it in any situation," I replied.

She asked, "How do you do it?"

I said, "Whenever I am feeling lost or filled with negative emotions, I get out my life statement and I rewrite it."

Just then we were turning into the driveway. She asked, "What is a life statement?"

I said, "It is a short document in which I try to capture the essence of who I am and what my purpose is in life."

"You have an actual document that does that?"

Something had changed. She was expressing genuine curiosity. She had, for a moment, changed her focus from her bad fortune, and she wanted to know more about my strange claims. This was a window. There was a possibility for integration and joining at a more meaningful level. She was momentarily open. If I continued to approach her correctly, our souls might begin to more deeply interpenetrate. We might exchange ideas and feelings. New images might emerge and a transformation might occur. Here was a chance for meaningful contact and entrance to the real of profound possibility. That is what happened.

I said, "Let's go to my study and I will show you my life statement."

She followed me to my study. I reached into a file and pulled out a sheet of paper. I handed it to her.

Robert E. Quinn: Life Statement

Long-Term Life Vision: I will continuously strive to reach a more authentic, complex and vital being state. I will strive to have purpose, exercise faith, engage reality, reduce my hypocrisy gaps and live an empowered (inner-directed) and empowering (other-focused) life. Living in this state, I will seek to put potential into the systems that surround me and facilitate their growth toward increased complexity. I will remember that the key is not the outcome but the being state. I will live in the extraordinary being state and attract people to profound possibility on life's upward spiral.

Short-Term Life Vision: I am healthy, active and happy. I have a loving and productive relationship with each family member. I strive to value and elevate people. I am with professional purpose. I am full of charity and virtue garnishes my thoughts so my relationships are meaningful.

Professional Life Mission: To understand and facilitate change so as to help people, groups and organizations encounter increased power, meaning and success. To leave a legacy that is reflected in a philosophy and school of profound possibility.

General Best Self Characteristics: In enacting my best self, I tend to be creative. I am enthusiastic about ideas and craft bold visions. I am an innovative builder who perseveres in the pursuit of the new. I do not waste energy thinking about missed opportunities or past failures nor do I take on the negative energy of the insecure nor do I worry about the critics. I do not waste

energy in defensive routines. I stay centered and focused on what is possible and important. I have frameworks that allow me to make sense of complex issues. I get to the essence. I can see disparate ideas and integrate them through yes-and thinking. So I make points others do not readily see. I tend to be inner directed so my message comes from an authentic level. I think deeply and speak with conviction. In doing so I frame experiences in compelling and engaging ways. I paint visions and provide new ways for people to see. I use metaphors and stories to do this. I find the stories in everyday experiences and people find it easy to understand them. The new images that follow help people to take action.

In helping others, I see the possibility for greatness in people. I calm them while I energize them. I help people identify their own core ideas, core emotions and core values, and it has a catalytic effect on how they feel and think. They see new possibilities and the excitement helps them find the courage to act. I give them my attention and energy but I allow them to be in charge. In exercising influence I do not try to think others into action. I try to enroll them in new directions. I do not try to sell but to invite people into my journeys. In pursuing the journey I seek reality. This means seeking honest dialogue. I do not get defensive or reject others if they are uninterested or otherwise minded. I make it clear that the relationship is more important than a conflict and honest dialogue will improve things. At such times, I surrender my ego and invite criticism.

As a teacher and interventionist I do not seek to inform but to transform. I use dialogue to help people surface their ideas, and then I weave them together with others until we create knowledge in real time. In doing so I move them from the abstract to the concrete and from the objective to the intimate. I ignore symptoms and focus on the deep causes. I ask piercing questions. I help people and groups surface the darkest realities and the most painful conflicts. From these emergent tensions comes the energy for transformation. I liberate people from their fears and help them embrace new paths. In all of this I try to model the message of integrity, growth and transformation.

High-Performance Profile: When I am at my best I tend to enter a meaningful situation that has the potential for increased synergy and long-term impact. I do not intrude. I am invited in because of perceived competence and credibility. I am integrated with a caring associate who tends to logistics and execution. I seek to understand the implicit processes and structures that drive the system. I search for the single bold stroke that will transform the existing paradigm. As I do so, I tolerate ambiguity, explore the parts and conceptualize the whole. These grounded observations allow me to communicate images with confidence and passion. People feel and see alternatives. I seek to both relate in terms of a loving relationship and to challenge in terms of high standards. That is, I seek to be empowered and empowering. In doing so, I facilitate the creation of an emergent community of empowered people. Toward the end I yearn for new stimulation and seek to manage the transition and movement to a new adventure.

High-Performance Roles: I am at my best when I play one or more of the following strategic roles.

- Explorer: I seek personal and collective enlightenment at the edge of chaos.
- Point guard: I seek to make the collectivity more than the sum of its parts.
- Interviewer: I listen for the underrepresented collective voice.
- Visionary: I conceptualize the unspoken need.
- Facilitator: I surface the truth that is too painful to be engaged.
- Storyteller: I attract people to change by sharing images that enable.
- Role model: I attract people to change by achieving and exposing an authentic self.
- Leader: I attract people to change by being change.

Daily Life Strategy Checklist: In order to accomplish these things I am: exercising; controlling diet; evolving physically; studying; praying; closing Integrity gaps; experiencing inspiration; tending to family; tending to others; protecting mornings for creative demands; controlling commitments; focusing professionally; disciplining finances; play.

Self-Empowering Questions: What result do I want to create? Am I practicing authentic commitment; am I practicing practical vision; am I practicing adaptive confidence: am I practicing carefrontation?

Theological Core: I experience myself as a being of spirit, light, truth or intelligence engulfed in a body of physical matter. I experience a constant struggle between the pursuit of higher purpose and the enactment of selfish ends. In the midst of my life struggles, I experience a process called revelation. Revelation is not just insight or knowledge. Revelation is a process of discovery that changes my being state in a specific way.

When I experience revelation, I experience an increase in light, truth, intelligence or spirit. It purifies, integrates and enlarges me. My motives are elevated. My heart and mind become one and I feel whole. I am enlarged in awareness and capacity. I become aware that light, truth, intelligence or spirit is everywhere around me and that I am separated from these resources by darkness

engendered by my fears. My capacity increases in that I become less shackled by my fears and move purposely and confidently forward in the face of uncertainty.

In this process, I take on a new or fresh view of the universe, of the world and of myself. At the universal level, my sense of a supreme and benevolent intelligence increases. At the world level, my sense of scarcity is replaced by a sense of abundance. At the level of self, I become more internally driven and more other focused. I clarify my purpose and I increase my yearning to help others. My grosser orientation is bridled and I increase in virtues like gentleness, meekness and love. As I radiate this purer love, and act in patterns that enlarge others, I am further filled with light, truth intelligence or spirit. In this state I seem to attract others into new patterns of higher purpose and the light in them burns more brightly. The intensified light in them further illuminates me. We become connected in the co-creation of light. In this process I feel that I am on a path toward a higher end. I believe my purpose is refinement of my gross self on life's great upward spiral.

For these reasons I yearn for revelation. I know the probability of revelation increases when I expose myself to faith promoting stimuli and when I exercise self-mastery and experience victory over self. Faith promoting stimuli include the past and present revelatory experiences of others, and my own past revelatory experiences. When I read or listen to the revelatory experiences of others, I am more likely to take positive action. When I ponder my own past revelatory experiences, I am even more likely to take positive action. When I search my present experiences for purposeful implications and revelatory indications, I am still more likely to take positive action. Cherishing revelation increases the probability of having revelation. In reflecting on past positive actions, I find the courage to move forward in faith, in reflecting on that experience I further develop. As I so develop, I increased light, truth, intelligence or spirit and I sense I am moving toward a transformation of profound importance.

Shauri's Reaction

Shauri was fascinated. She read the document carefully and then she asked, "When you feel bad you read this and it makes you feel better?"

"No, when I feel really bad, I take my life statement out, read it carefully and try to rewrite any part of it that I feel needs revision. Or I add something that was not there before. The document is always evolving. When I finish rewriting the document, I feel more clearly about who I am. By knowing what I most value, I become stable."

"To make change I have to become stable at one level so I can change at some other level. If my values are clear and stable, then I can confront the issues that previously made me confused and fearful. My being state changes. I end up in a proactive mode. I have the energy to move forward no matter how negative my emotions. In fact, my negative emotions tend to disappear before I even start to act. Just clarifying who I am and what I want to create seems to energize me. Even the thought of movement becomes purifying."

"There is another reason for rewriting. People think values are permanent, like cement. Clear values can stabilize us, yet they are a living system and need to evolve. Each time we face a new situation and reinterpret our values they change just a little bit. Rewriting a statement like this one allows us to inject our own learning and development into our values. Hence our values also evolve with us. We co-create each other."

She told me it was hard to understand some of the words in my life statement. I explained the document is not written for anyone but me. I have written it over and over and it has become more and more personalized. It reflects my innermost language. Some of that language is even invented for me by me.

She asked how the life statement might apply to her situation. I suggested that instead of spending the weekend feeling bad about what happened and working through all her reactions to the event, she might instead spend the time writing her own life statement. She would thus move from being a reactor to becoming an actor. Many people spend their lives being acted upon. We are meant to create not to react.

She responded that she would do exactly that and she did. At the end of the weekend she flew home. A few days later she sent me a copy of an amazing letter. I have her permission to share the letter. I would like to present it in parts and make a few observations on each part. The letter was written to Kristin and Travis. She described her painful experience and her decision to fly home.

Dad picked me up from the airport and on the way home he started to ask me questions about what and how I was feeling about the situation with Matt. At first the focus was just on the pain I was feeling and self-pity as I wondered what was wrong with me and if I would ever find anyone to love. I was just going over and over the problem. Dad turned the conversation from "solving my problem to finding my purpose." My gut reaction initially was to bring it back to the problem. I wanted to wallow in the pain of the problem. I thought I was looking for a solution, but it wasn't until I allowed the conversation to really flow into my purpose that I found the solution.

Negative emotions pull us into the reactive mode. They drain us of energy and lead us to quit. We are dammed and/or damned by our negative emotions. That is, we cease to move, initiate or create. We therefore cease to grow. When I talked about finding

purpose, she wanted to return to the pain. In doing so she was deceiving herself into arguing that she was trying to solve her problem. That was just an excuse for not acting. When she moved to finding her purpose, her entire outlook changed.

As I thought about this, the realization came to me that I should start looking to purify my life right now. This tied into Dad's ideas on focusing on purpose rather than problems. In working to purify my life I would be focusing on service and things of higher purpose rather than on my day-to-day problems. Doing this would take care of the problem.

After reporting these insights, Shauri's letter makes a surprising turn. She shares an e-mail message she had recently authored. It turns out her former boyfriend contacted her and indicated he missed hearing from her. In her response to him she writes the following:

WELL the last thing I want you to go through is email withdrawal. That can be painful for anyone. And it is so easily remedied!

I was really sad after our talk - more than I thought I would be during our talk. I still can't totally pinpoint why. I think a lot of it was because even though I was never 100% sure on whether we were right, I still put more into it than I ever have with anyone else. I opened myself up to hurt and I don't usually do that. It was a good growing time for me though. I also think rejection hurts regardless of how you feel for someone or why they do it, so I probably felt bad that you didn't LOVE me. Finally I think it hurt because I spent a good bulk of my time with you since May and I felt I wasn't just losing a potential relationship, but also a good friend. Separation is not my strong point.

So that is my analysis of my pain. You didn't realize you were opening up the door for all of this information by e-mailing did you?

Anyway, this weekend was so good for me. I had the best talk with my Dad. He picked me up from the airport and we started talking about how and why I felt sad about you and it moved into his recent letter about problem finding versus purpose finding. We started talking about how I needed to do to purify myself. He suggested that I needed a vision. He said that if I clarified my purpose, all the periphery problems that seemed big (like my talk with you) would disappear and take care of themselves. I was so motivated by this.

I'm going to send you a copy of the letter my Dad wrote about this. The focus on purpose is something that I think you might find helpful in your life right now. My Dad and I also talked about making conversations more meaningful and sharing spiritual intimacies with people. I won't go into that right now, but it was a great topic for me too. I was just excited to make some changes and find a vision. The reason I'm sharing all of this with you is because I feel like the process of deciding how we felt about each other actually deepened our relationship. I learned to communicate more effectively because of you and open myself up and share all kinds of feelings so the outcome is I feel like I can still share anything with you. I hope you feel the same about me. I think we've established a great friendship and I hope you feel the same. I think we may have tried to force feelings a little that weren't there- maybe timing was off, maybe it just isn't right now or ever, but I definitely want to keep our friendship. I hope you feel like you can tell me anything and that I will be here for you no matter what because I will. I appreciate your honesty with me about your feelings. I think what you felt is right. I hope you know I love you!

Shauri

Shauri decided to share the above message with her roommates and it brought a strong and predictable reaction. They argued that message was too honest! They could never imagine so opening themselves up to someone who had just rejected them. I suspect that previous to this moment that Shauri would have agreed. Yet something had changed. She was suddenly less "normal" than she was before. What Shauri writes next is of great consequence.

The funny thing is I felt a huge sense of peace about it all. It was liberating... I was no longer worried about his response or reaction to me or to what I told him. I chose to act rather than react. Because I did, it freed me and empowered me. In giving up control in this situation I gained control of the situation. I wasn't worried about Matt's response, I had been completely honest with him, and strangely it gave me confidence. My purpose is to purify myself and serve others. Since I began working toward that purpose I have been set free from my problems and they are resolving themselves. I feel filled with light and I know that as I continue in purpose my light will grow brighter and brighter and I will lose myself in it.

Shauri's experience illustrates a number of points. First, it is normal to be reactive and to have negative emotions. All people are pulled in this direction. Though most people claim they hate the negative emotions they are feeling, they do not behave accordingly. They choose to stay in their negative state. They seem to become addicted to the process of wallowing in "the problem." It is natural

and, in a strange way, it is "comfortable" to be in such pain. At such times we make the victim role our path of least resistance. At least it is a role we know how to play.

Second, our being state can be controlled. We do not have to stay in the victim role. We can choose our own response. We do this by leaving the "external" world where we claim the problem to be. We go "inside" ourselves, not to the problem but to our purpose. When we go inside to clarify our purpose, our perception is altered dramatically. The original problem does not necessarily go away it just becomes much less relevant. We "outgrow" the problem. It is much less important than it was.

Third, our being state changes the world. As soon as Shauri started to clarify her purpose, she felt a sense of progress. Negative emotions turned positive. She started to feel faith, hope, strength, confidence and love. The new positive emotions empowered her and made her empowering. She became inner directed and other-focused. She started to create the relationships in her life. She became a leader. She had made a being change and now she was leading change. She was a model that others could look to elevate their own lives.

Since the above events transpired, there has been a dramatic change in Shauri's life. At the professional level, her career has suddenly taken off. She went from frustration and fear to a bold job change. Her performance on that job has been full of creativity and she has become a successful young professional. She now loves what she is doing. She presents herself in a much more potent yet peaceful way. Shauri made a change in her being state, and now her external world is a dramatically different world.

Conclusion

What is the lesson? We are all Shauri, people who experience devastating events. We are all imprisoned by our fears. We are all locked in our comfort zone. When we do, we remain normal. We are all that woman from marketing. We remain reactive and filled with fears and other negative emotions. While we do it, we deny that we are doing it. We thus begin to get depressed and we begin to slowly die on the inside. The challenge is to stop problem solving and to start purpose finding. When we do we start to have greater influence and impact because we have made a change in our being state. We have moved from the normal condition of being acted upon to the extraordinary condition of being an actor, initiator and creator. We create our own best self.