



Leadership Living

the MasterPoint™ Series for the ascendant professional

by Tim Herd

Career pathways vs. Storm tracks



One long-ago day back on the farm, my Dad, my little brother and I were washing the blue and white Oldsmobile, when Dad suddenly dropped his sponge on the stones, scooped up my brother and tore for the house, yelling for me to follow. Of course, being the contrary child I was, I didn't. That is, until I spied a rotating column of air swirling dark with field dirt and lots of dried-up cornstalks approaching from the springhouse: *OHHH! WAIT FOR ME!*

The conventional wisdom in surviving a tornado used to be to open the windows in the house to equalize air pressure, and take refuge in the southwest corner of the cellar. Research has since shown that open windows simply permit the extreme winds to enter the house and sail away with the roof. Studies of

the damage shows there's no statistically safer quadrant of the house, since tornadoes can find you from any direction. The safest shelter is in a basement closet or other small room with four strong walls.

There are a couple things about severe storms worth noting:

- ✓ There's nothing we can do to alter them (try as we might).
- ✓ Their exact tracks are largely unpredictable (and only partially conceivable).
- ✓ There's no shortage of them (yikes!).

Severe thunderstorms, hailstorms, flash floods, tornadoes, firestorms, hurricanes and blizzards—they all blaze ragged trails of spoils and damage. Such are not the kinds of predictable paths we plan to follow—these are the kinds that track *us* down! Moreover, not only can they find us easily enough, *they know where we live!*

There is no shortage of nagging problems, worrisome conflicts, and overwhelming tempests that can swirl about our lives at any time, in any form, and from any direction. Sometimes we're forewarned; sometimes we're blindsided. As leaders upon whom other people depend, how are we to cope and still continue to lead?

When it comes to weathering such crises and problems—whether physical, psychological, professional, pecuniary or preposterous—there are a couple of strategies we can proactively employ:

1. Prepare in advance. Keep a sharp “weather eye.” Anticipate change. What are the trends in your industry, profession, hot-potato issue or celebrated cause? What new paradigms are appearing on your horizon? Study the probabilities of real risk, then solidify your allies, stockpile your provisions, stabilize your operations and steel yourself.

2. Heed the warnings. Seek the wisdom of those who know more. Pursue the counsel of respected thought leaders and those who have survived similar onslaughts. Learn from the fatal mistakes of those who held a hurricane party in a house that vanished with the storm surge. How can you best function should the blast blow your way?

Storm tracks will cross our pathways, but need not become them.

3. Don't provide cause for escalation. Just as when a real tornado strikes, shut the windows to things that can make conditions worse. Keep perspective to prevent panic. Stay alert to swirling currents and shifting pressures to avoid further misfortunes. Seek ways to mitigate stress, de-escalate danger and prevent collateral damage.

4. Seek shelter. When, as children, my sister and I played outdoors in snowstorms, we would hollow out a hole in the side of a large snowdrift so that when the blizzard blew stinging shards of ice into our faces, we could stuff our heads into our private hidey-holes and wait out the blast. Some calamities can be career-changers, but they need not be career-*enders*. Hunker down for the duration in a safe refuge.

While there's no avoiding the storms that bear down on us, do remember this: their twisted tracks only cross our pathways, not become them. Skies clear, lanes reopen, and we may re-emerge intact, to continue on.

MasterPoint 76

Weather difficult disturbances with proactive preparations.

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