



WHAT KATRINA CAN TEACH US ABOUT LEADERSHIP

Over one week ago a major disaster hit part of the Gulf Coast of the United States. I have been reflecting on the disaster, the response to it, and what lessons we can draw about leadership.

Don't worry this isn't a political piece...

Lesson 1 - Leadership is important. Much has been made that areas weren't as prepared as they could have been. Leaders could have changed that. Many have said that the initial response (at all levels from local to the Federal Government) wasn't perfect. Leadership can improve that in the future.

Lesson 2 - Leadership can come from everyone. Not just those with a title, but everyone can lead. Thousands of stories of heroism, and leadership are coming out of these events. Not all of them are stories of people wearing a badge or a official title. We can all use our leadership abilities.

Lesson 3 - Remarkable leaders know that blame takes too much energy. In recent days it seems that the focus of the "story" of the disaster has changed from the disaster to who did what wrong and how it could have been done better. Let's be clear. This was a disaster of monumental proportions. Could things have gone better? Of course. Was the way things were handled a travesty? No. Will blaming and pointing fingers at others solve the problem now? Absolutely not. Every ounce of energy being spent in blame and "Monday Morning Quarterbacking" is an ounce of energy better spent on meeting the vast challenges that still exist. Which leads to...

Lesson 4 - Remarkable leaders focus on solutions, not problems. Rather than looking at what is wrong, they look at creative ways to make it better. Remarkable leaders know that when they are point a finger at others, four times as many fingers are pointing back at them. They take responsibility, and focus on solutions.

Lesson 5 - Remarkable leaders know when to reflect and when to act. Will there be a time to look back and learn from the failures in processes, procedures, and responsibilities used during the time immediately following the storm? Yes. Will there be people that may need to be held accountable for some of those decisions and actions? Of course. I just don't think that time is now. A study and review will be commissioned, I'm sure, as it should be. Leave that learning for then.

My bottom line? I believe that right now, leaders of all sorts, from township supervisors, to mayors, to state legislators, to those in government agencies, to Congress, to the White House, need to look forward and work together to meet the many challenges we will face for months. There is a time for reflecting and a time for action. Now is the time to look forward.

In your own leadership development keep this in mind. Remind yourself of these lessons.

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