

Welcome to this month's Leader's Circle backgrounder. Well, the last two years, I don't need to tell you this, have been some of the most deeply polarizing in almost a century. And a lot of those divisions have become entrenched and don't seem ready to change anytime soon. I hinted at it in the church trends unit. If you looked at that session, some of the stuff we thought was temporary probably is a little more permanent and the internet has not made that a lot easier. If you want some resources on the division that's coming, George Friedman wrote a book in 2021 called *The Calm Before The Storm*, which I read about a year ago. It was really, really helpful in this.

And so I share this not because it's going to help you solve the battles of vaccine, no vaccine, mask, no mask, all that stuff for the last few years, all the angry emails we got. I'm sharing this because I think we're into an era where the division is going to continue and perhaps it'll get worse. I hope it doesn't. But even if it stabilizes, we're still more polarized and divided than we were before. But that is also... I mean, you look at American history, you look at the time of the Civil War, you look at the time of even countries like Canada, my country, who are breaking away. And there's always been division, division between countries, division between peoples, division between groups, division between factions. And so we were used to a little more unity in the church. We were used to a little more unity among our client base and customers. But what do you do when you live in a divided era? So that's what this post is about. I hope it helps.

So you're leading a more divided group of people than you ever imagined, and you're leading them in a very angry era. Talk about complicated. People have always been somewhat divided. I mean, history is a story of division in some ways, but in our lifetime, it's never been this divided or at least felt this divided. And people have rarely been this angry. You've seen it in your family. You've seen it in your church. You've seen it in your company. You've seen it in your staff. And the divisions have rarely been greater. They're political, economic, racial, geographic, ideological, theological, and more. And COVID and the political polarization that have ensued have only magnified the challenge. The future, unfortunately, doesn't show any signs of uniting people automatically. In fact, as you know, left unattended, the divisions will likely only grow deeper and wider.

So one of the tasks of leadership is to unite people, around a common cause. That's simply what leaders do. A divided culture needs a united church and a divided nation needs a united people. That's the role leaders play. And my guess is, deep down, you wish your church, organization, or company was a lot more united than it is. You're having that challenge even on staff. And while leadership has always been hard, this particular moment makes it even harder than ever.

So the question is, how do you do it? Well, here are six keys to leading through division. Number one, start with yourself. Listen to the public dialogue, watch social media, read your email, check your texts, and you'll see so much blame and accusation. Then monitor the tone and ask yourself, "Well, okay, wait a minute. I'm on social media. I send emails. I'm communicating. How am I coming across?" I mean, what part of this... It's so easy, right, to look at other people and say, "Oh, it's her fault. It's his fault. He's so divided. He's so angry." Well, how are you? I mean, what have you owned? How are you coming across? Do you check in with other people? Is everyone else to blame in your mind? You see, what's missing from the cultural conversation these days amidst all the division is confession. And the death of confessions has led to the rise of the opposite of confession, blame and accusation.

So as a Christian, as a person of faith, I remind myself that Jesus never asked us to confess the sins of our enemies. He told me to confess my sins. He didn't tell me to confess your sins. He said confess your sins, Carey. Pride will spiral out of control. And sometimes you say something online and you don't want to apologize, or you said something in a message, or you said something at a staff meeting and you don't want to apologize. What I have to remind myself, because I get there too, is that only humility will get you out of what pride got you into.

Remember, though, that on the other side of confession, I was wrong, is often forgiveness. Christians believe that truth and love are fused together, and in that is hope. So when I want to speak the truth and I want to speak the truth, I have to remind myself, if my truth doesn't look like love, it's not truth. And if my love isn't anchored to truth, it's actually not love. When Christ is truly present and working in your life, truth and love are never separated. The gospel is the antidote to a post-truth, post-fact culture. And the objectivity of the gospel functions less like a sledgehammer, I'm right, everyone else is wrong, and more like an anchor in this storm of uncertainty.

Ultimately, most of the people you lead will adopt your tone. So if you're selfish as a leader, they'll be selfish. If you're angry, you'll draw out the anger in them. If you're loving, if you're reasonable, if you're kind, most people will pick up on that cue. The tone of the leader usually becomes the tone of the team. So what's your tone?

And with that in mind, let's move to number two. Just know you won't win them all. Now, I wouldn't have said this a few years ago, because I don't like to give in, but now I'm at the point where, given the deep entrenchment some people have in their ideologies, their views, and commitment to spewing hatred, you won't be able to reconcile everyone. I know that was probably true for a long time, but it's especially true now. Now that doesn't mean God can't. It just means that in all likelihood, you won't. We're in an angry, divided, spiteful moment as a people, and tragically, the people of God, or those who claim to be the people of God, are no exception. That said, it isn't the majority of the population or the people you lead who lean militantly left or militantly right. It's just a fraction of them. I mean, you're hearing from the polls. You're hearing from the fringe, the very small single-digit minority on either side. It's an angry fraction, a loud fraction, but it's still a fraction.

So the principles I'm sharing, I hope will help with most people, but perhaps not all people. In the end as a leader, you have to be prepared to let the toxic people go. There's a small but militant group who are not open to anything, anyone, and resist any view but their own, and they're going to leave, and you should probably let them go. Don't spend 90% of your time pursuing the 1% of people who are toxic. Think about it this way. Once the cancer leaves the body, the body gets healthier. And if you think this is unchristian, if you're a person of faith, I encourage you to reread the scriptures. It's not. The fact that you can't win every battle doesn't mean that you're not a leader. In fact, it's proof that you're leading. You're offering to take people in a direction they don't want to go, and that's actually leadership.

So don't close your heart entirely to the people who are walking away or the toxic people, but be prepared that they're probably going to leave and reconcile yourself to that. And then moving forward, keep your heart open to people. When you close your heart to all people, you close yourself to God, and the challenge in leadership is to see life as it really is, this is hard, but keep your heart fully engaged. There are a lot of good people left and a very good God. So keep your heart open for them.

Third key, start with the core, not with the crowd. One of the challenges of leading in the 21st century is everyone makes their opinion known, and usually publicly and loudly in front of everyone. So as you scroll through your social feed, you'll see person after person you lead posting memes, links, and opinions about what they think on any given issue. And if you're like me, your stomach will sink as you realize you're trying to lead all of them, this disparate ragtag group of people, in a common direction. To make it even more complicated, you have a bajillion inboxes and everyone can message you anytime on social or via email to let you know exactly what they think. And they do. You can't even watch Netflix with the kids without someone urging you to do whatever they're passionate about in the moment.

And most of us feel a pull to try to unite everybody, maybe a great social post talk or sermon will do it, or writing a manifesto. And of course, as soon as you say it out loud, you realize, okay, this isn't going to work. It's really difficult to bring about unity from the fringes or in the crowd. Instead, rather than trying to unite the crowd, start by trying to unite the core. It's simpler. Your core is smaller. And you might

hear from the fringe regularly, but you lead from the core. The core of any organization is usually quite small. For me as a leader, it's usually been my senior staff and my board. And no matter how large or small your organization is, unity at the top has a way of filtering through the entire organization.

The good news is, uniting your core, which is usually probably not more than 10 to 12 people, is remarkably easier than trying to unite the crowd. You have a personal relationship with all of them. You know them by name. There's trust and respect and all of that that's been built. Using the principles that I'm sharing on your key team will not only help unite them, but the people you lead will sense the unity of mission and purpose that you share.

Think about it in family terms. You can break up a fight between the kids for a few minutes, but if you and your spouse are constantly arguing, it makes it hard to bring peace to the house. So when you're in a good place as a couple on the same page, united, you have each other's backs, bringing peace in the family is so much easier. United at the top, united at the bottom. Divided at the top, divided at the bottom. Unity spreads. So does division. So start with the core, not the crowd.

The fourth principle is this: do the math. So what about the crowd? I mean, the crowd isn't going away. You might have a united core, but what about everybody else? Opponents fill your inbox and social media with angry messages, often writing in all caps because they've got it figured out while you and the rest of the world don't. Those messages, I'm like you, they rattle me more than anything else I get. I can get a hundred kind messages and one nasty one, and for days all I think about is the angry comment. That's why math is your best friend when it comes to navigating the future. Now, you already know this if you did the session we did on the five groups that impact how to lead change. But if you didn't, here's a recap. The opponents, the people who are opposed to what you're doing, claim to speak for everyone, and they're louder than anyone, which naturally leads you and me into the trap too many leaders fall into. You mistake loud for large. Don't. Don't mistake loud for large. Almost always, the angry voices represent a small part of the overall group you're leading. I'm not saying you don't need to listen and learn, or that you're always right and they're always wrong. What I am saying is don't let a minority of angry voices sabotage your future.

When it comes to change or charting the path forward, I am saying that generally speaking, human dynamics often looks something like this. 10% of people are opposed and loud. Those are the opponents. 10% are audibly supportive and they're eager to see the change brought about. That's the early adopters. 30% are quietly supportive. That's the early majority. 50% are quiet and neutral. That's the quiet majority. In other words, only 10% of people are typically opposed to the change you are proposing, which means 90% aren't. While that percentage might be momentarily higher, it's not nearly likely as high as you feel it is.

So take the math a step further. Let's say you have 100 people in your church or organization. You live in a small town of 10,000. The angry opponents represent 10% of the people you lead, but they're only 0.001% of the community you're trying to reach. So the question becomes, are you seriously going to let 0.001% of your community hold the future hostage? Are you going to sacrifice the 99.99% of people who will eventually embrace the good change for the sake of the 0.001% who won't? I didn't think so. And there's your courage. So now, go architect the change.

Fifth principle, focus on what you agree on. A further few tips, just to deescalate the tension and build unity. After all, there's so much that divides us right now, but to lead effectively in a time of division, focus on what unites the people you lead, not on what divides them. How do you do that? Well, start with some very basic things. At the core, we all have our common humanity. We're all people trying to do our best with our fears, our hopes, our dreams, our insecurities, our needs, and the people we love, our families. That's a lot of common ground. You also have your mission. I find the more I rally my current team around our mission to help people thrive in life and leadership, the closer our team gets

and the more effective we become. For decades as a pastor in the church, I rallied people around what we agreed on about Jesus and our common mission to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus. That unites people who might typically not gather together under a very powerful core cause.

You want to break it down really simply? Instead of asking someone what they think about politics, ask them how their kids are, how they are, what they dream about, what they're struggling with, and what they need. You'll find far more common ground than you can imagine. Focusing on what unites you, not on what divides you, is not just a great way to build unity. It's a great way to move together into the future.

Then finally, key number six, explain the why twice as much or 10 times as much as the what and the how. In the good times and bad times, your job as a leader is to remind everyone why you're doing this in the first place, every day, multiple times a day, almost as often as you open your mouth or type into your phone. I realize that leadership can get so discouraging and dysfunctional that you need to remind yourself why are we doing this, right? Primarily, leadership consists of answering three questions: why, what, and how. What and how dominate your leadership conversation unless you ensure that they don't. And think about it. This is what you hear all the time. "Okay, Carey, so what are we going to do again? Okay, how are we going to do that? Well, how much is it going to cost? Well, what about these other ideas?" And you can see it's easy to get trapped in tactical questions like this, and they tend to be divisive because people have different ideas. Now that's why why is your best friend. Of the three main questions leaders deal with, why, what, and how, only why unites. How and what divide, and why unites. We're here to reach all people, right? Oh yeah, that's right. We're here to reach all people.

The challenge is that when things are fractious, people always want to talk about what and how, hence the endless debates about whether to open, reopen, masks, distancing, online, vaccines, and everything else that clogs up your inbox. That's when the best you can do as a leader is to pull the conversation back and elevate it to the level of mission, which sounds something like this. "Well, let's think for a few minutes about why we started the church. Okay, everybody take a minute and pray for someone you know and care about that we're trying to reach. One of the best things about this place is your deep commitment to Christ and reaching people. What's one of the greatest things you hope God will do over these next few months?" You see how those questions, questions like that bring people together?

In a business setting, it can sound something like this. "Let's think for a few minutes about why we started this company. Okay, everybody take a minute and think about something you believe our company could do to help. All right, how about this? One of the best things about this place is your deep commitment to our values and mission, and I so appreciate that about you. Or how about this? What's one of the greatest things you hope we can do together over these next few months?" See the power of why? A good rule is to talk about why twice as much or 10 times as much as you do about what and how. In a crisis, yeah 10x is probably a good idea.

So here's a recap. Start with yourself. Tone of the leader becomes the tone of the team. Know you won't win them all. You're going to have to let some people go. Start with the core, not with the crowd. Much easier unite the core than it is all these people in the crowd. Number four, do the math. Loud does not equal large, and don't sacrifice 99.99% of the people for 0.001%. Focus on what you agree on. There's a lot you agree on, and explain the why twice as much or 10x as much as the what and the how. So do that, and you're on your way to a better, forward-looking dialogue.

So another factor in all of this, leaders, is you need to think about the energy you expend, right? When you think about toxic people... First of all, you know if you've got that difficult meeting again and again with this person, you're drained even seeing it on your calendar. And then you've really got to think about where do I spend my energy? Like me, I only have so much energy to bring to life and to bring to

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the job. And so you really want to look at that, so then you can get on with the most important work of casting vision and leading your organization into the future. Hope this helps.