



Chaos in the Afternoon

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As days go, even in a pandemic, yesterday was a very bad day. My last day in the office was March 13th, and I've been past my driveway only once since then. It's not been a terrible time - my husband and I are quarantined together, our house is comfortable, and we're in a metro area with plenty of delivery. And I'm old enough to know how to cook - and old enough to have grandchildren who can visit virtually.

Working from home has been okay. We brought in a terrific President and CEO, Tino Mantella, in 2018 and I was already spending less time at the office. I had a "home office" set up at the end of our long kitchen table, and I've simply taken over a bit more real estate. After finally realizing that the internal camera in my laptop had died, I replaced it so that I could join Zoom meetings, webinars, book clubs, and cocktail parties.

I was to be a panelist for Cynthia Good of [Little Pink Book](#) at 4pm in the afternoon yesterday, and the topic was Leadership versus Management in a Crisis. I planned to talk about the multiple conceptions of this distinction:

- That management is often seen as dealing with tasks and leadership as inspiring, mobilizing, and influencing people. In a crisis it's incredibly easy to get overwhelmed by the management tasks - I've been personally guilty.
- That there are, as Ron Heifetz says, technical problems and adaptive problems. Technical problems are ones we've seen before - we have a playbook for solving them and managers can follow the process. A pandemic - and the response it requires - is an adaptive problem if we've ever seen one. Adaptive problems need leaders who can help the best thinking emerge from a group - and they don't have to have formal authority.
- That we may need to think about leadership with a "big L" and leadership with a "little l." Leadership with a big L is your position of authority - if you're in a senior role people are going to look up to you, and you'd better be ready to communicate, calm, and connect. Even from home, you've got to be ever-present as a leader. My fellow panelist was to be Carolyn Homberger, Chief Risk Officer of ACI Worldwide, who, despite having three children at home, has led large team meetings from closets.
- I have also seen a lot of leadership with a "little l" recently. Real leadership is a choice, not a position - it's seeing a problem and stepping forward to solve it, and we've seen that happening all around us. Whether it's figuring

out how folks work from home or building cloud infrastructures after years of false starts, we've seen client organizations resolve security issues and move forward almost overnight. We've seen pivots on a dime. We've used the "Geese Leadership" metaphor so many times over the years - when the lead goose tires, it rotates back into formation and another goose flies to the point position – and we have never seen so many people taking point.

But I didn't get to say any of that, or much of anything else I had planned. Comcast is our internet provider, and had been a relatively good friend until yesterday, The panel was at 4 pm, and at 3:40 the connection went out. We rebooted the router and the modem. That didn't work. We disconnected the router and the modem and left them off for five minutes. We reconnected and there was still no internet.

Our cell coverage is terrible at our home, but I figured perhaps it would work to at least join the seminar, see folks, and just do audio. That worked, barely, for about 22 minutes, and I was able to contribute a few garbled comments. At 4:53 I realized that I should try our land line to just call in as a participant, but by that time things were wrapping up. At EXACTLY 5 pm Comcast restored our internet. At exactly 5 pm.

I wish I could say I took this all in stride - it was, after all, just a nasty technology glitch. But I didn't - I was frustrated and beyond annoyed.

Then I got out something I had hoped to read during the "Empathy and Self Care" portion of the "Zoominar." It's entitled "Blessing in the Chaos" and it was sent to us by a friend early in the crisis. It was written by Jan Richardson, and this is the portion I now read every morning:

"To all that is chaotic in you, let there come silence.

Let there be a calming of the clamoring,

a stilling of the voices that have laid their claim on you,

that have made their home in you...

Let there be an opening into the quiet that lies beneath the chaos,

where you find the peace you did not think possible

and see what shimmers within the storm."

This is a storm like no other, but there is so much that is shimmering in this beautiful world. One of the amazing joys of this sheltered time has been truly SEEING an Atlanta spring. I have said so many times recently - "Is this just an incredibly beautiful and perfect spring, or have I simply not noticed before"? I've been outside more, and in the lovely hours before dark, I've been home, not in an office building.

One of my long-time favorite quotes is from Montaigne - "my life has been filled with terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened." I have spent so much time ruminating about the past and thinking about the future. Surely I'm old enough to do a better job of living in the present, and I think there's nothing like a pandemic to spur a little growth.

So my new favorite quote, attributed to Linji Yixuan is:

The miracle is not to walk on water; the miracle is to walk on earth.