

Question & Answer

Stewart D. Friedman,
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School of Business



The best leaders
act with respect,
authenticity,
and integrity —
especially
in times of
downsizing.

How to let the ax fall gently

By Jane M. Von Bergen
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Right behind a heavy hand on the horn and nimble reflexes, a successful New York cabbie needs to develop the ability to listen.

"Everyone's on a different journey, but I guess that's a hackneyed thing to say," recalled management professor and former cabbie Stewart D. Friedman — not realizing he had made a truly clever pun.

These days, the journey can be full of potholes, as more people lose their jobs and those who remain fear the road ahead.

Friedman, who directs the Wharton Work/Life Integration Project at the University of Pennsylvania, has been doing some listening and thinking about how front-line managers can lead their staffs through today's rough ride.

To help, he is drawing upon the principles in his book, *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life*, published by Harvard Business Press last June.

The book suggests that the best leaders act with authenticity by looking inside to clarify what's important. Then, they act with integrity by respecting the whole person — themselves, their families, and the people who work with and for them.

See FRIEDMAN on C4

Stewart D. Friedman

Age: 56.

Job: On the management faculty at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business.

Book: "Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life."

Hometown: Merion.

Grew up: Brooklyn, N.Y.

Family: Wife, Hallie Boorstyn Friedman, psychologist; children, Gabriel, 21; Harry, 18; and Lody, 15.

Bad habit: Correcting, unasked, other people's grammatical errors.

Saturday morning ritual: Make coffee, get newspapers, read them while on elliptical machine.

Book recommendation: "The Soloist," by Steve Lopez.

Why: A compelling story that sheds new light on a critically important social issue: mental illness.

Proud of: His father, Victor Friedman, 78, a hairdresser at the Waldorf-Astoria whose first photography book, "Flag," is being published by Penguin in the fall.

Lesson learned: It pays to persist in pursuing your passion.

Management professor says the key is to listen

FRIEDMAN from C1

The path to that is understanding expectations of colleagues, family, friends, and self, and then crafting creative personal "change" experiments to build a richer life.

Question: Imagine this: On Friday, your laid-off people are packed up and marched out by security, as you, their direct supervisor, shake their hands and wish them luck. On Monday, you must face the demoralized staffers who survived. What next?

Answer: What I think is most useful is to somehow give people a clear picture of reality. In other words, don't bull about what might have been or what might be, but be as transparent or honest as you can about what you know.

Q: And then?

A: You can never reiterate your common purpose enough. If you had nothing else to say, it would be: "What do we stand for together? What is it we are trying to achieve? What's our collective purpose?"

Q: Well, food's always on my mind. Should a manager bring in coffee and doughnuts? Would that help?

A: Food would be a good thing to do. What people need at that time is a kind of comfort: "I have a friend here. Somebody sees me as a person, not just a cog in a machine." The more you can break through that, the better the outcome is going to be for all.

Q: Do you express your own feelings of pain?

A: Yes. I think you say, as honestly as you can, "This hurts."

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Tell a story about how, you know, you knew Pat all these years. And what great experiences you had working together. And why you admired her. And how painful this is. But this is our reality, and we have to move forward. You have to have some expression of empathy.

Q: Should people have the opportunity to vent?

A: I would recommend that. But I think it has to be contained. You can't just have a day of screaming and ranting. But people need to feel heard for the pain that they're feeling.

Q: Feel heard?

A: Yes. They need to feel like you understand their point of view and their feelings about what has transpired. And you're going to be light-years ahead of the game to the extent that you can demonstrate your understanding of their point of view by expressing your own.

You see, too many managers feel like they have to hide behind a mask — I mean, we all do to an extent — but that they're not permitted to express feelings of sadness and pain. I think the more you do that with a vivid example, you are going to puncture a lot of the stress that other people are feeling.

Q: So we're picturing a morning meeting with food and with talking about pain. How do you make the shift into moving on?

A: You have to remind everyone: We serve a purpose, whether it's cleaning the streets, making diapers, or writing news. We all have a purpose to serve, and we're going to proceed. Yes, it's going to be more difficult, and we're going to have to rethink how we get things done.

Then call upon your group to be generating ideas for how to now cope — how to revise how we get things done, given that we're going to have to change. I think it's important to be moving and concluding with ideas for action. You want to engage as much as possible your group in feeling like they have a part in providing a way forward that makes sense from their point of view.

Q: What is the worst thing you could do on that Monday morning?

A: The worst thing you could do is heighten the fear. You could deny the painful reality, and basically say, "Suck it up" and pour on the work. What you have to do instead is dial down the stress.

Q: Is there an opportunity in all this?

A: The current moment in our social and economic history — while devastating and tragic for so many people — has also created an opening for a reimagination, it seems to me, of where work fits in the context of life.

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