

# This is Your Captain Speaking: 5 Keys to Leadership in Tough Times

By Liz Bywater, Ph.D.



Sitting comfortably aboard a full commercial flight, ready to depart from Boston's busy Logan Airport, I hear the captain's calm and assured voice issued from the cockpit:

*Folks, let me tell you what's going on. We are ready to taxi but there is no ground crew to push us back... Now there's no good excuse for this, but at least you know the truth. We're working on fixing it, and it shouldn't be too long. We will keep you up to date.*

Listening to the pilot's words, I am struck by the clear leadership displayed in this simple and direct communication. His approach is perfect for the situation. In a few short sentences, he manages to keep his passengers and crew feeling assured, calm, and sufficiently in-the-know.

It's a great example of leadership, with lessons that can be applied right away. Whether you are an airline pilot, a hospital CEO, the leader of any organization, here are five keys to helping your people navigate challenging circumstances:

**Be honest.** There's nothing quite so refreshing or reassuring as being told the truth. Your employees will appreciate it. Your customers will treasure it. And it's really so much easier than devising a more calculated response.

**Be clear.** Clarity is key to ensuring your messaging gets through quickly and without needless ambiguity or confusion.

**Take ownership.** Be willing to say from the get-go: *This is my responsibility. I won't minimize or excuse it. And I'm going to fix the problem.*

**Exude confidence.** Especially important in uncertain times, your employees, customers, investors, and board will be reassured when you express your genuine, unwavering confidence. This isn't about being false, naïve, or unrealistic in your assessment of the current situation. Instead, it's about saying, *I know we've got a problem here. We will find our way out, and soon.*

**Be the face (and voice) of calm composure.** Be steady and calm, no matter what comes your way. Your tone and attitude will help guide and stabilize your people, fostering a sense of safety in uncertain times. That's going to have a profound impact on engagement, creativity, productivity, and commitment at all levels of your organization.

There's no getting around the fact that there will be fits and starts on the path to growth. Some of them are within your control, some are not. Some are minor delays in getting off the ground. Others are major roadblocks. Regardless of the nature or scope of the issue, remember this. Strong, confident, accountable leadership is a must.

*Take a moment to reflect on how you lead your organization through challenge and change. Are you consistently honest, clear, confident, accountable, and composed? If not, what's holding you back?*

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I hope you've enjoyed this edition of Dr. Liz on Leadership. Each month, I will share new ideas, tools and advice to help you thrive in today's ever-changing healthcare environment. Let me know what's top of mind and I'll answer your most pressing questions in future columns. Contact me at [liz@lizbywater.com](mailto:liz@lizbywater.com).

For additional tools and thought leadership, check out my all-new website, [www.lizbywater.com](http://www.lizbywater.com). And don't forget to pick up your copy of [\*Slow Down to Speed Up: Lead, Succeed, and Thrive in a 24/7 World!\*](#)

