



# The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

## ***Leaders During Stress and Under Stress*** ***October 28, 2008***

*In this month's 60-Second Email™, we provide suggestions for leading during stressful times.*

The American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908 - 1970) suggested that humans have 5 levels of needs. The 5 are:

1. Physiological: The need for water, food, air, sleep, etc.
2. Safety: The need for stability and safety of one's person, family, home, city, employment, etc.
3. Love: The need for love, affection, and intimacy.
4. Esteem: The need for self-esteem, self-confidence, sense of worthiness, self-respect, etc.
5. Self-actualization: The need "to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming." (Maslow, 1943)

Maslow also posited that in order to fulfill the higher order needs, such as Esteem and Self-actualization, one had to resolve the preceding ones. As an example, if you don't have food or water, your focus on esteem and self-actualization will be limited. Only until you adequately address the Physiological, Safety, and Love needs, can you really move up the hierarchy and properly fulfill the need for Esteem and Self-actualization.

Why the discussion of Maslow? Think of your employees. Think of your colleagues. How many are focused on self-actualization these days? Probably not as many as late last year, when the word "swap" meant only "trade", as in "Wanna swap your baloney sandwich for my ham and Swiss?"

So what's a leader to do during these times of great stress?

First, given the waves of layoffs and foreclosures that families have experienced or witnessed, assume that many of your people have moved down Maslow's need hierarchy towards level 2.

Second, get out of your office. Be visible. Be seen by your people. Yes, you may be just as, or even more, anxious than your employees. Now's not the time to show it. If you need to hyperventilate, do it behind closed doors.



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Third, make time to check in with employees individually. Ask how they're doing, how their family is, etc. You don't need to be Dr. Phil, and it doesn't need to be a meeting with an appointment. On-the-fly is fine. Just make sure you stop and focus on them.

Fourth, communicate honestly. If there's bad news to communicate, do so clearly and honestly. Don't sugarcoat to ease people's pain temporarily. False hope is insidious, and it ultimately breeds cynicism, particularly if you're the one fueling the false hope. You will undermine your own leadership credibility.

Finally, take time for yourself. During times of crisis and great stress, time itself is scarce. So it may be for only a minute or two a day, but find time to email, Skype, text, Twitter, phone, or talk to a colleague. Compare notes, commiserate, build mutual hope. There is safety in numbers. And with that achieved, you can move back up to Maslow's levels 3, 4, and 5.

You can access this and previous issues of our 60-Second Email™ newsletter, including last month's issue on Leadership By Yourself, By the Book, via the following link to our website:

<http://www.advisoryalliance.com/newsletter.php>

Until next month,

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