

Reinventing Leadership by Edwin H. Friedman
(Video/DVD produced and ©1996 by Guilford Publications, New York, NY.)

Guide for Viewing and Discussion
2008 Moderators' Conference
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

(Note: The introductory section of the video is not appropriate for the 21st century multi-cultural, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic context in which we live and minister. I suggest beginning the viewing with Part I rather than with the introduction – CMM)

Introductory Premise: contemporary western civilization is stuck, similar to:
Medieval Europe just prior to the “discovery” of America
America during the years prior to the Civil War

It is only when we risk, adventuring into the unknown (like Columbus, Ferdinand Magellan, Vasco de Gamma) that we can get unstuck. (Just as families can get unstuck when one of the members risks moving in a healthier direction. See his book, Generation to Generation for a “family systems” approach to understanding your church.)

“We are living in a society that is more focused on safety than adventure.”

Part I: How a Society Becomes Stuck

American Society has been behaving like an anxious family.

Characteristics of a Chronically Anxious Society:

1. A high level of Reactivity – responding without reflection
2. A Herding Instinct - togetherness rather than differentiation
3. Blaming – within and without the organization
4. Quick Fix Mentality

We want simple answers to our problems -
Linear thinking and certainty

For conversation:

Which of these characteristics of a chronically anxious society is most visible in the system in which you are called to moderate? What, in your opinion, triggers this symptom of anxiety?

What are some possibilities for you as a leader, and as the Moderator, to assist the system in beginning to address the anxiety?

Part II: Barriers to Effective Leadership

1. The Fallacy of Expertise – we emphasize information and technique.
2. The Fallacy of Empathy – the most dependent members set the group's agenda.
3. The Fallacy of Self – we overlook the importance of self. We need to learn to know where I am. . . Who owns the problem?

For conversation:

Which fallacy is most at work in your system? How does the fallacy reveal itself? Against which fallacy are you personally most vulnerable? What are some possibilities for addressing this vulnerability as you serve as Moderator?

Part III: Becoming a Self-Differentiated Leader

1. Focus first on yourself and your own self-differentiation
2. Don't get triangulated.
3. Don't allow your functioning to be determined by the "emotional field" you find yourself in.
4. Stay in touch with yourself and others. Engage in an on-going process of figuring out what you stand for, without being unduly influenced by others.
5. Be a non-anxious presence.

For conversation:

Who or what issues in your system tend to triangle you?

Given what you know about yourself as a leader, what and where are some possibilities for practicing the art of self-differentiation as you serve as Moderator of your governing body?

Qualities of Leadership

(Note: Again, the examples of leadership used in this section are not appropriate to our 21st century context.)

1. Vision – seeing things differently from those around you. Having enough emotional separation to risk seeing things differently.
2. Uncommon Persistence
3. Stamina - the "ruthless" ability to handle mutiny
4. Maintaining self-regulation in the face of sabotage – we risk sabotage whenever we behave in a self-differentiated way that signals we don't "need" the ones around us as deeply as before. Sabotage brings back togetherness. Sabotage usually comes by undercutting us, or by seducing us. . .

(Note: The video's final section refers to the four United States Presidents who preceded the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. These Presidents are lifted up as examples of those not possessing the qualities of leadership focused on by Dr. Friedman. Lincoln is then discussed as possessing all of the qualities. This section was omitted from our viewing of the video at the Moderators Conference.)

For conversation:

Which of these qualities of leadership does your system most need from you as its Moderator? Why? What will you need to work on to help yourself focus on these needed qualities? And how will you do this work?