



# Be The Calm Person in the Boat... Leadership During COVID-19

**The COVID-19 pandemic has brought great uncertainty...among families, companies, communities, and the world. Leaders must understand how to overcome their own fears to inspire and engage their teams during this difficult time. But how can leaders be calm, assertive and decisive to help their teams continue to succeed?**

International leadership expert Dr. JP Pawliw-Fry spoke at the AAIS Virtual Main Event, providing advice on being 'the calm person in the boat'...controlling emotions and inspiring others to deliver results. Dr. Pawliw-Fry described how Vietnamese refugees fled their home country after the Vietnam War in cramped boats on rough seas. Many refugees became sick and died...but in some boats, the rate of illness and death was much lower. When researchers studied the healthier boats, they noted that there was at least one 'calm person' aboard...promoting a positive atmosphere that became contagious. He said that studies show that the most emotional person in a room will affect other people. He challenged leaders to use their emotions to affect the feelings of their peers and teams.

It's not enough to be calm, however. Dr. Pawliw-Fry talked about the importance of realizing what we are and aren't communicating in tough situations. He introduced the idea of the 'last 8%,' saying that in times of conflict, it's common to avoid the last, hardest 8% of what needs to be said. This leads to confusion, conflicting messages and a lack of understanding about action needed to resolve the issue. Dr. Pawliw-Fry says leaders may avoid conflict or make a mess of the situation...both negative outcomes in a time where a positive solution is needed. He suggests

thinking about the hard conversations and pressure-filled situations they've faced during the pandemic... conversations like employment, business interruption, and changes that could be hard or uncomfortable.

How can the hesitation around the last 8% be resolved? According to Dr. Pawliw-Fry, a good leader will recognize and overcome the desire to avoid communicating the hard, but important messages. The exceptional leaders can overcome the last 8% with a high level of emotional intelligence, or EQ. Being able to understand, respond to, and learn from emotions matters more than traditional IQ and technical knowledge. Those leaders with high EQ use self-awareness and feedback to get to the next level of performance...even during times of pressure, like a pandemic or other catastrophe.

Dr. Pawliw-Fry said that when leaders are under pressure, they stop listening, focusing instead on their internal monologue and needs. Parts of our brains only allow us to hold 4-6 thoughts front of mind at a time. During times of pressure or stress, thoughts can be dropped, causing us to revert to classic 'fight or flight' responses to avoid conflict. Leaders must be able to not only realize when they're dropping thoughts, but know how to respond to them...and recognize when their team members are dropping thoughts, as well.

Leadership during a tough time is hard, but not impossible. By understanding how to communicate tough messages, recognizing how to communicate under pressure and setting a calm example, leaders can not only survive, but thrive in times of crisis.

[See Dr. JP Pawliw-Fry's full segment in the VME Library, and check out exclusive Bonus content from Dr. Pawliw-Fry here.](#)