HOW DO YOU, AS A LEADER, OVERCOME ADVERSITY?

By SANDY CLARKE
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W hen we talk about what makes a great leader, there is one quality that regularly gets overlooked: the capacity for overcoming adversity.

Brian Tracy, renowned leadership author and motivational speaker, poses the following questions for us to consider: “What do you make of? What are you really made of? When push comes to shove, when the rubber meets the road, when the chips are down, what lies at the very core of your character?”

Perhaps there’s no showground more intense when it comes to dealing with adversity than the political arena. Leaders are relentlessly scrutinised and any slight error can be the difference between establishing one’s name in the corridors of power and fading away into political obscurity.

A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

One example of a local political leader that was faced with adversity is former Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, who was arrested earlier this year for alleged corruption.

The former banker and current secretary-general of the Democratic Action Party (DAP) Malaysia found himself at the centre of a highly charged political debate between government and opposition supporters and as Malaysia looks forward to electing its 14th parliament in or before August 2018, Lim faced truly testing times.

Having been active in politics for over 30 years, Lim has encountered his fair share of controversy, including being sent to jail in 1998 for 18 months – a major setback which denied him the chance to stand for public office for five years, which saw him lose out in the 2004 general election.

Despite the difficulties he has faced within a country that has cracked down on some senior figures connected to alleged corruption, Lim appears to be able to draw from a well of strength and resilience in his commitment to overcome adversity and continue in his public service.

GOING THROUGH FIRE AND WATER

The ability to push on, regardless of what life throws our way, is the one characteristic that can help to ensure success in whatever we desire to achieve, as we become better equipped to deal with the unexpected and meet our challenges head-on.

As Tracy puts it, “One of your main jobs in life is to become an expert in dealing with adversity, to triumph over difficulty, to rise above the challenges of day-to-day life. Keep your thoughts on where you’re going, not on where you’ve been. Keep your eyes on your goals, and keep your chin tilted upward toward the sunshine. Resolve in advance that you will meet and overcome every difficulty, and then, no matter what happens, don’t give up until you do.”

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4 LESSONS LEARNT FROM DATUK LEE CHONG WEI

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This article is published in conjunction with Datuk Lee Chong Wei’s birthday yesterday.

I’m sure most of us watched the final moments of the Olympic badminton finals between Datuk Lee Chong Wei and Chen Long, and witnessed the heartwrenching moment when Lee lost. I really felt for him.

Even when we were preparing for bed that night, I was still telling my hubby, Jamie, that I feel Lee’s pain and anguish.

On hindsight, there is so much I have learnt from Lee:

1. PERSEVERANCE

It was not an easy journey to go from national player to world champion. It was not easy to bounce back after the doping incident, a time where Lee said he felt all but his wife shunned him.

Yet he did. And when he returned, he came back with a vengeance – better and stronger. From world ranking No 180 due to his suspension, he regained his No 1 ranking, relegating Chen to No 2.

2. NO EXCUSES

He fought so gallantly to bear his nemesis Lin Dan at the semi-finals. When he lost his national quest for gold medal to Chen at the finals, he apologised for letting his country down. In truth, he did not need to apologise because we could see that he had done his best.

Yet he did. That’s because he wanted to be accountable; he wanted to take responsibility and not give any excuses. He has a victim’s mind-set. A true winner always take responsibility and never blame others.

3. A GREAT AND WORTHY COMPETITOR

I believe that for Lee and Lin, without one or the other, they would not have been the legendary players that they are today. As rivals on the court, they challenged each other, moulded each other, and spurred each other on to become faster, better and stronger. It is often easy for us to dislike our competitor. However, it takes an extraordinarily strong and wise person to embrace competition wholeheartedly because they know that our competitors make us better.

4. HUMILITY

Despite being a world champion for so many years, winning so many titles and championships and even being conferred Datukship, Lee has always remained humble and down-to-earth.

Even though Lee has not won a gold medal at the Olympics, he has won the hearts of millions many times over with his humility, sportsmanship and perseverance.

Thank you for the inspiration, Datuk Lee Chong Wei!

4 QUALITIES IN OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

RESILIENCE

Faced with adversity, the best leaders remain unflawed by whatever challenges they encounter. They accept whatever comes their way and, rather than worry and anticipate the worst, they always look for the best ways in which they can move forward. Top leaders recognise there’s no value in trying to change the unchangeable, and so they focus all their energy on making the best of the situation.

TAking RESPONSIBILITY

Regardless of whether difficult situations are brought about by the leader themselves, or are the result of circumstances outside their control, effective and willing ownership of their situation. They don’t look to assign blame, and they don’t offer up a truckload of excuses. By consciously taking responsibility of their situation, they retain full control of themselves and are thus able to respond, rather than react, to adversity.

ADOPTING A POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE

Even in the most challenging circumstances, there are lessons to be learnt. Leaders of quality don’t dwell on negativity; rather, they consistently look for ways they can learn and develop insights from tough situations. They can even view their predicament as a gift of sorts, one that provides an opportunity to strengthen character, resolve, and patient endurance. Whatever the challenge, great leaders will always find something of value within their hardships.

STRENGTH

We often hear the advice that we should focus on improving our weaknesses. But in adverse conditions, focusing on one’s strengths are something effective leaders do to help them through their turbulent times. It might be the easy option for some to crumble under the weight of pressure that’s placed upon them, but hardy leaders will relish the chance to galvanise their strengths and meet their challenge with aplomb.

CLEAR VISION

As is frequently the case, leaders can find themselves in potentially career-wrecking situations. Rather than pore over the ins and outs of how their difficulties come about, leaders with the ability to overcome adversity recognise that it is useless to look backwards unless they intend on heading that way. Instead, they begin to set new goals for themselves and create a clear vision for the future.

Life can and will throw dangerous curveballs our way from time to time. Even when leaders get knocked down, they look to get back on their feet as soon as possible and find ways to continue in their passion of serving others.

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