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I believe we can all agree that from preachers to teachers – from Wall Street to across the street – from city halls to the halls of Congress and from the state house to the White House – there has never been a time in modern history where the shocking failure of leadership at every level has been so devastating and the resulting emotional and financial carnage left in its wake so wretched.

It seems our House of Representatives with an approval rating of 10% has become the House of Mis-Representatives and with the growing pressures on state governments throughout the country, whether in Augusta, Maine or Austin, Texas, our state houses are becoming poorer houses, struggling to fund even the most basic services.

But closer to home and more relevant to us in this room, our towns and cities are being expected to do more with less and city council chambers across America are being turned into torture chambers by ax grinders who run not to serve, but to divide, confuse, obstruct and cast suspicion on staff and others not for the common good, but for their own selfish, sometimes even vengeful good.

We find ourselves today engulfed in a culture many of us no longer understand, where each new day seems to bring about a new and more challenging crisis. Our country is in crisis, we have crises in leadership, crises in our economy, crises in our homes, crises in our communities. Which tells me and what I want to leave you with tonight – it tells me

it is time for us as leaders to face the music even though we may not like the tune and step up to the plate and accept responsibility and welcome, *welcome* accountability.

In fact, when *did* we *stop* accepting responsibility and *start* pointing fingers whereby our failures are someone else's fault, where our politics overrule our principles and where being right, no matter how wrong, is more important than being real.

And that's all our constituents, taxpayers, voters and stakeholders are asking. Even if the news is bad, be real with me; even if you do have to raise my taxes, just be real with me; even when you *do* mess up, don't cover it up, just be real with me.

The late Thomas Tip 'O Neil once famously said that "all politics is local,"...and while what happens in D.C. obviously drives the national agenda, we at the local level in this time of crises have the awesome opportunity to become ourselves, the change we and those we serve so desperately want to see in the body politic.

Because it is us the people see, touch and feel down at the local diner or at the corner store...who they call in the middle of the night when the neighbor's dog won't stop barking or to tell us that the garbage truck was late *again*. But tell me, when they look *at* us and look *to* us, do they really see a difference *in* us in how we operate and how *they* operate inside the Beltway?

It is time for you *and* for me to look more introspectively, because the truth is, what drives us *internally* will be expressed *externally* in how we live and how we lead. And those expressions, whether they be good, bad or somewhere in between, can bring about incredible success or demoralizing failure.

Former television host Jack Parr once said, “looking back, my life seems like one long obstacle race, with me as its chief obstacle.”

No doubt, if we could kick the person responsible for most of our troubles, we wouldn’t be able to sit down for weeks!

“We have met the enemy and he is us,” said the fictional cartoon character, Pogo. Or in other words, the *enemy in me* – that which causes good people like us to do bad things; intelligent people like us to make less than intelligent choices; and that which causes moral people like us to commit immoral acts.

I became more intensely interested in exploring the whys of public leadership meltdown when a friend and colleague who was an election away from perhaps being elected the next mayor of the City of Dallas got caught up in the largest, most widespread FBI investigation of city hall corruption in the history of the City.

And then I began to notice in seemingly epidemic proportions, public sector leaders across the spectrum from PTA presidents to town administrators that were falling like dominoes and thus began for me, the quest for why?

Why would any respected, successful, keeper of the public trust knowing that we live in the fishbowl of public life – risk it all and throw away a career, a marriage or reputation it took years of sweat and sacrifice to build? What would make one think that in the age of the internet and camera phones and You Tube that what's done in the privacy of a bedroom won't become made for TV drama played out in our living rooms?

I am not the Dr. Phil for public sector leaders. But I am however, like some of you in this room, a local elected official who understands that while public service is rewarding, noble and admirable – it can also be very brutal...made even more brutal by the battles we bring on ourselves.

Those of us who haven't tumbled have likely come pretty darn close a time or two – because none of us, from city council members to staff members are insulated from nor can we resist committing what I call the Seven Sins of Leadership. All of us, any of us are just one misstep away from disaster!

And we've all done at some point in our careers what I am about to share with you – we've just never been caught. Don't ask, don't tell.

But like Babe Ruth answered to the reporter who once asked him about a batting slump he was in at the time. Even though Babe had hit 714 home runs at the time he had also struck out 1,330 times. The reporter asked him, he said. “how do you keep from being discouraged?” The Babe just looked at him and said, “ I realize the law of average will always catch up if I just keep swinging.” The moral, if you’re doing these things I am about to share with you, and haven’t been caught yet, stop – because like Babe said, the law of average always catches up.

And when it comes to you as a public leader, when the law of average does catch up, these seven will take you further than you want to go, cost you more than you want to pay and damage you and your family in ways you never thought possible.

They have shattered the lives of some of the most powerful and influential people, even small town heroes, and big city big wigs alike.

Because of them, some who once led lead no more and some *have* never, nor *will* they ever reclaim their place of prominence.

Worse, to the embarrassment of themselves, their friends and families, these fallen leaders have become the butts of many a joke, and in some cases are held up as the poster child for public officials gone wild.

Let's take a brief look at these Seven Sins of Leadership and learn how to master **them** before **they** master us.

Because even though I know we live in a time that ignores absolutes, these seven are timeless, they are deadly – and I dare say if you look at fallen leaders throughout history, up through today, one or more of these will be the culprit.

They are enticing, they feel good and they can be oh so fun...for a while anyway, and they typically destroy us at one of two points in our career – at our peak of promise or, at our peak of performance...Always...This holds true for any leader... anywhere... whether in Maine or in Texas.

Think of the times you've heard someone or perhaps you yourself have said after hearing about someone you know or someone famous who has surprisingly fallen....what will be said is something like, “And she had such potential, such a promising career ahead of her” – **peak of promise** – or, “Man I can't believe he would do such a stupid thing – he had it all.” – **peak of performance**.

As we look briefly at these seductive seven, I want you to ask yourself, at what point are you? Are you at your peak of promise or are you at your peak of performance?

Let's look first at the mother of them all – Arrogance. UCLA coaching legend John Wooden once said, “Talent is God given – be humble. Fame is man-given – be grateful. Conceit is self-given – be careful.”

In 3 words --- GET OVER YOURSELF!

Arrogance is nothing more than internal insecurity expressed outwardly in haughty and pompous ways. Ego nurtures it, adoration feeds it and pride swells it.

But there are too many people (including colleagues and co-workers) who will loathe your success, resent your resourcefulness, envy your influence and when you flaunt it, they will be in the wings with a pin with your name on it, waiting for the most embarrassing opportunity to burst your bubble.

Never get carried away on the alluring wings of arrogance, because just when you think you've reached an untouchable, cruising altitude, is when you are about to take a nose dive.

Pride indeed goeth before a fall – and those who are arrogant will always fall back to earth the hardest and loudest. People admire confidence, but detest cockiness – especially in those whose source of cockiness is by virtue of a title or position they've been ALLOWED to hold.

People love to see the arrogant get their comeuppance and will do all they can, even partnering with an enemy in order to bring you down. Never get too high – because there will ALWAYS be someone, somewhere scheming to bring you down.

Arrogance will cause you to laugh with pride today, but weep with shame tomorrow. Stay humble, because humble pie can be a bitter mouthful to swallow.

The second sin of leadership is foregoing purpose for popularity. No one can be all things to all people and as Max Lucado so well puts it, **“A man who wants to lead the orchestra must turn his back to the crowd.”**

Our purpose as leaders should be a direct reflection of the needs of those we serve. We exist by their permission and by their tax dollars. Our purpose should never be about us, but always about them. But purpose has given way to popularity and public leaders have become increasingly adept at exploiting the fragile vulnerability of a disillusioned public by sacrificing purpose on the altar of popularity.

Popularity is never permanent. And the more popular we become, the more vulnerable we become, because popularity has an intoxicating way of breeding a sense of invincibility. And when we become so popular that we believe we’re invincible, a fall is looming.

The American public is starving for authentic, purposeful leadership. They have grown weary of publicity hounds masquerading as public servants, fat cats getting fatter at their expense and promise makers who turn out to be promise breakers.

May I share a secret with you? Popularity is a byproduct of excellence – just be good at what you do – very good at what you do. Make it your purpose to serve with unselfish and unparalleled excellence. If you do that, not only will you ward off a regrettable fall, but you will be surprised to find you won't have to look for popularity – popularity will find its way to you! And when it does, be humble!

The third sin – ignoring your core (i.e., your conscience). That built-in compass, that little voice inside of us which serves as a reference point to help us determine right from wrong. If we can resist the sometimes overpowering urge to ignore it, our conscience will keep us from accepting donations we know are illegal – profiting from deals we know are dirty – doing things we otherwise would not if we thought others were watching – and from forfeiting overnight what it took years to earn – a good name. It is not only what our conscience will keep us from, but also what it will keep us out of – handcuffs at the local jail and someone else's bed at a preferred hotel.

The depth of our conscience determines the breadth of our character. Show me a leader with no conscience and I will show you a leader with no character – and one whose fall is only a matter of time because as the great British journalist and statesman John Morley once put it, **“no man can climb out beyond the limitations of his own character.”**

And our behavior is governed by our conscience and exemplified through our character. We simply will not do some things because our conscience won't allow it. Nothing can over rule our conscience but our own arrogance fueled by an unbridled ego.

And as public leaders, we are often caught between these tensions of ego and conscience and depending upon which one we chose, will determine if we give in to the affair, if we take the bribe, if we go on the junket or simply say no and run as fast as we can in the opposite direction.

Listen to your core...unlike other advisors in this business, it will never, ever steer you wrong!

Oh what tangled webs we weave when first we practice to deceive...the fourth, but no less deadly, is lying.

An old axiom in politics long forgotten is this: "If you lie to win office, you will lie to stay in office." If you lie to get the promotion, you will lie to keep the promotion. The trouble though is that with lies... you may get ahead in the world, but you can never go back to the real world, and when reality bites, and it will bite – you will lose your electability and more important, your credibility.

These are the principle reasons public leaders lie – out of fear, out of a need to be accepted, the need to be respected, the need to be rewarded, recognized and perhaps the biggest of all, to cover for perceived inadequacies.

But deceit always leads to disaster. And while lies are cheap – the maintenance and embarrassing aftermath are so very costly.

The 5th – Ruling out the Rules – Victory at the ballot box does not give us a free pass. It is embarrassing when the rule maker becomes the rule breaker and our campaign photos are replaced by our mug shot photos. We break the rules out of 1) a false sense of security... *oh, I'll never get caught*, or so we think...2) when we become overly confident and 3) when we become too comfortable. Never be fooled by this false sense of security. Follow the rules – don't bend them, don't break them and don't cover for those who do.

Underestimating Risk – Risk taking is commendable, risqué behavior is stupid. Our talents will sometimes take us where our character cannot keep us. Temptation is powerful. Look before leaping, count the costs and then ask yourself two questions, **“Is this risk worth the reward, and are the consequences REALLY worth taking the chance?”** *What if my wife finds out? What if my boss finds out? What about my kids? How will they face their friends at school? What if a reporter finds out?* If confronted with a situation where there is doubt about either question, take this simple advice because it works every time – when in doubt – don't!

Lastly, as a public servant, you need to know your rights. I believe when they give us our oath, they should also give us our rights... *you have the right to remain silent – every e-mail and text message you send can and will be used against you in a court of law and in the court of public opinion.*

There is no loyalty in politics, not even office politics and what today may be a comical e-mail or hot text shared between friends and lovers, could tomorrow be used to deep-six your career. Always imagine the words you are typing on your computer screen or cell phone screen being flashed to millions on television screens around the world, over the internet or in your local newspaper. Sometimes, no response is the best response; and the delete key better than the send.

As I close, I realize this may all sound hokey, old fashioned and out of step. But we have gotten away from the basic tenets that made this country the greatest nation in the history of the world – chief among them, governing based upon foundational truths rather than political spin. And y'all, voters so desperately seek this in their elected and appointed leaders. Even though we are living in a world today where anything goes and all sense of decency and genteelness are gradually fading, principles such as truth, authenticity and purpose will never become passé.

I began this speech talking about the crises and challenges our country face and those we as leaders of our various cities face. But challenging circumstances and tough times don't MAKE us who we are, they simply REVEAL who we are.

America is still the greatest, best and most resilient country on the face of God's green earth. And I believe that when great people are faced with great challenges, it doesn't break them... it just motivates them.

But we as public servants must continue to lead and serve and not lose heart – we must lead and serve with integrity, we must lead and serve with honesty – and we must lead and serve with transparency. Because so many people are depending on us.

May God bless you and strengthen you in the challenging days ahead as you continue to faithfully lead and serve the people of this beautiful state...