

## Lessons Learned from the Current Crisis

As the corona virus epidemic and related chaos unfold nationally and locally, I believe they are teaching us some valuable lessons. For me, these include lessons about character, leadership and even ageism. James Lane Allen famously wrote, “Adversity does not build character, but it reveals it.” On a daily basis we have seen that truth play out in countless ways. We have witnessed remarkable heroism and self-sacrifice from our doctors, nurses, other medical care providers and first responders. Unlike even in many wartime situations, many of them are putting their own lives in danger to help their patients. Some of them who have retired are returning to help. They give lie to “they’re only in it for the money.”

On the other side, some of our fellow citizens from the outset of the epidemic have selfishly disregarded the common good by hoarding not just household items but also important health aids like hand sanitizers. Others have disregarded common sense public health measures like social distancing and avoiding crowds. I do hope that these people are a small minority. I know some of them believe that in a free society one of their personal rights is the right to do risky things--- like riding a motorcycle without a helmet. They argue their actions don’t affect others. In many cases I would disagree, and this crisis is one of them. People who hoard or ignore public health practices are clearly endangering the rest of us as well as themselves.

Community organizing expert Marshall Ganz reminds us that in our organizing efforts we must be about developing leaders. He says leadership isn’t important when there’s a clear group consensus about a course of action. However, he says having good leaders really matters in situations where there’s a lot of uncertainty and a lot at stake. That certainly describes our present situation. He says leaders must listen to the group’s members, and I would add that in this crisis leaders must also listen to the scientists and other experts. But most importantly, they must make timely decisions and move the group forward. Without being overly politically partisan, I think our Governor has been a role model of that kind of effective leadership during this crisis.

Shortages of vital equipment, medical supplies and hospital beds have prompted some troubling voices in our country. Some, including elected leaders, have started calling for rationing virus care to ensure that younger folks will receive it. They have asked seniors to consider stepping aside from getting needed care because “after all, they’ve had a long life.” I haven’t heard that extreme view around here, and a lot of it may be just political grandstanding. Nevertheless, the fact that it has entered to the national public discussion even on the fringes is troubling and we need to speak up against it.

Last year when I was pondering retiring this spring, my wife’s comment was, “What am I going to do with you hanging around here all day?” Unlike me, she has a robust circle of friends and is an active volunteer in several organizations. With the onset of this epidemic I am living most of the time confined to home or walking around the neighborhood. This has been a preview of my retirement, especially for once I can no longer drive. This crisis has taught me a valuable personal lesson---I’m not ready to retire.