**Certainty vs Clarity**

Bob Johansen raises a very important point about leadership in an unknown (VUCA) world in his book *Leaders Make the Future*. He states that it is apparent that the urge for certainty has increased in the world, leading to an increased choice of leaders – good or bad – that are certain but not necessarily clear.

This is because when people are confused, they are attracted to certainty. False clarity abounds. People will want more fundamental certainties along religious, political, social and psychological lines than ever before. Certainty and fundamentalism will go hand in hand as we are already experiencing. To counter this, leaders need to learn to lead in a turbulent age.

He concedes that absolute clarity will rarely be possible in the new world, but says leaders can choose to be *more* or *less* clear. The best leaders will understand that people crave simple answers, but they will not fall into the easy answers trap. They understand that when people go over their personal threshold capacity for disruption, they will seek immediate solution.

Andy Stanley writes in his book *The Next Generation Leader* that in today’s world of rapid change, few organizations have the luxury of “certainty” in their operations, products and services, and customers. “Uncertainty is not an indication of poor leadership; it underscores the need for leadership.” The tension between certainty and clarity will be a key dilemma for leaders to manage within themselves.

The best leaders in this new world will be sensors and listeners. They will seek clarity from many sources and continue to hone their own. These leaders can see through contradictions and discern what to do even if it is not apparent. They are guided by a clear purpose and know what they don’t know with humility, yet they are confident in their vision.

Johansen suggests it starts with deep listening to the environment, stakeholders, customers, employees and then becoming clear about your vision and how you will “make” the future. Leaders that are able to filter out noise and attend to what is really important will have a significant advantage. Leaders of the future need great clarity about direction, but great flexibility about the details.

Certainty is about a feeling of absolute knowing, however clarity:

* + Includes curiosity about other points of view, certainty does not
  + Includes knowing what it is you do not know; certainty does not think about not knowing
  + Is expressed in stories; certainty is expressed in “shalls”
  + Is resilient; certainty is brittle.

To finish off, I love these quotes:

*“Certainty itself is an emotional state, not an intellectual one. To create a feeling of certainty, the brain must filter out far more information than it processes. In other words, the more certain you feel, the more likely you are wrong.”*–Steven Stosny, Ph.D.

**“Great leaders recognize that clarity of vision is more important than certainty of the outcome.”** –[Lolly Daskal](http://www.lollydaskal.com/author/admin/)

“Many people think leadership is easy and fun. However, the more responsibility you assume, the more uncertainty you will be expected to manage. Uncertainty is not the enemy but is the opportunity. The leader’s responsibility is to bring clarity in the midst of paradox and ambiguity.” – Dennis Hooper

Andy Stanley advises, “Clarity requires confidence and humility. Confidence to move boldly in the direction you have determined. Humility to acknowledge that at best you are making an educated guess.”