

The Vermeer Podcast – Episode 9

Leading Through a Crisis

Kate Guess:

Hey there. My name is Kate Guess and I'm the Vice President of Human Resources here at Vermeer. I've been here at Vermeer for about seven years, but for the last three years, I've had the opportunity to serve in the capacity of leading our talent efforts here at Vermeer. And it's been anything but quiet in those last three years. We've navigated a tornado and now a global pandemic, and we've learned a lot and we're proud of the way that we've led through the crises here at Vermeer. But that doesn't happen. It doesn't happen automatically. And it requires a lot of intention in how we navigate through the challenging times as well as the good times.

I think for me, I had the opportunity back in 2017, before I took this role, to be a part of a leadership group that was really going to dig in how to use influence and leadership for good.

It brought people from all different kinds of industry, nonprofit, education, media, consulting, the church together. And we did a lot of impactful things that year, but one of the most meaningful was traveling to Haiti together to spend some time with Haitian leaders to compare and contrast what leadership looks like in the United States and in Haiti. And I will never forget one of the first exercises we did when we got together was to explain our jobs or explain our roles. And the short story of that is that when you try to explain your role in an environment like Haiti, you quickly understand that your job responsibilities don't matter nearly as much as you think they do. What does matter is how you lead and the purpose behind why you lead. And when you're actively leading from a place of purpose, you can carry that into the good and to the challenging times like we've had these last few years.

So shortly after that experience happened, the tornado hit. And in that crisis, we had the opportunity, many of us in leadership roles here, to really let our purpose, our leadership purpose, fuel us and to activate us into the work. You really have a choice in a time of crisis to be driven by purpose and meaning, or to be driven by the reactive challenges of the time. And while it's not always easy, you've got to choose to intentionally lead from that place of purpose. Otherwise, you're going to get burned out real fast. And for me, that purpose that I've identified as my reason why I've been placed where I've been placed to lead is to bring light to dark and dimmed places. To take something like confusion and chaos and turn it into clarity. Help people understand what they can control and what they can't control and give them confidence that there's a way forward.

I think for me, one of the biggest lessons learned through all of this is that you've got to have resilience and stamina in times of crisis. And by operating from a place of purpose, you're much more capable of giving yourself that stamina that you need because you know there is a deep meaning behind the work. And for me, I always try to have something, an anchor message, that guides me through challenging times. And for me, that came the Sunday after the tornado when I was at church and the Scripture from Jeremiah, "I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them so they no longer fear and tremble and none shall be missing", was really the anchor message for me during the tornado. And it's been that same anchor message during this crisis of the pandemic that our job as leaders is to take away the fear and trembling and to make sure that every single one of our team members gets to the other side of the crisis well.

Thanks for listening. May you be equipped for wherever your leadership journey takes you.