

## Leadership: The Problem Isn't the Problem

What I started to say—my opening line was going to be: “I apologize for saying the obvious.” And I guess I do. But all I’ve been doing for the last 40 years is saying the obvious. Like: “If you put people first, good things will happen.” And stuff like that. So I’m going to say the obvious one more time. That’s my goal. That’s who I am. I’m here to remind you of things that you’ve known for years and years and years. And here’s one that’s very, very near the top of the list: The problem is never the problem.

The response to the problem is almost always the problem. We see it in politics all the time, whether it’s Richard Nixon from the right or Bill Clinton from the left. We see it in finance like Martha Stewart. I don’t know any of those high-visibility things where the person who did the thing ever got in trouble for the thing they did. They always got in trouble for the response to the thing they did.

And it’s just as true for you and me. In my earlier books, I had a line one time, or a chapter one time, where I said, “Perception is all there is.” There is no reality. There is only perception.

And so, the way you deal with a problem is, frankly, so much more important on many dimensions than the problem itself. Coming clean, coming clean fast, overwhelming response, whatever it happens to be. But, please remember, think about it every day, write it on a piece of paper, put it on your wall, put it on your screensaver: The problem is never the problem. The response to the problem invariably becomes the problem. Make those responses positive, quick, and overwhelming.