

Healthy Congregations Respond to Anxiety

1. Reactivity

- Personal attacks.
- Boundary erosion.
- Exaggeration of extremes.
- Loss of playfulness.
- Uproars over perceived slights.
- Leaders become less imaginative and eventually get worn down.

2. Herding

- Togetherness as extreme value.
- Polarization and cut-off.
- Adaptation to immaturity.
- Totalism in thinking and relating ("You're with us or against us").
- Leaders become indecisive and function to soothe rather than challenge.

3. Blaming

- Fault projected outside of self.
- Loss of accountability.
- Cynical pessimism.
- Leaders become focus of blame or are sabotaged.

4. Quick-Fix Mentality

- Low pain threshold.
- Simple answers.
- Quest for certainty.
- Emphasis on data and technique.
- Leaders don't challenge themselves to deal with their own emotional being.

5. Poorly Defined Leadership

- Don't have capacity to step back to think out their vision, beliefs, and principles clearly.
- Agenda set by crises.
- Reluctant to take well-defined stands.
- Least mature most apt to be selected to lead.
- Leaders chosen who have too little self to deal with sabotage.

Five Characteristics of Chronically Anxious Relationship Systems



Adapted from Edwin Friedman, A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix, pp. 81-116.