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## What can Roman Emperors Teach Today's Leaders

By F. Frank Ghannadian, Ph.D., Dean, Sykes College of Business



F. Frank Ghannadian

Many have become familiar with the name Marcus Aurelius from the 2000 hit movie "Gladiator" where Richard Harris portrays him as a great Roman general. Of course, the movie is a dramatization of the real historical truth. In history, Marcus Aurelius ruled Rome from A.D. 161 to 180. He fought in Germania where his legions there were commanded by the Roman General Maximus. Aurelius was murdered by his son, Commodus, because he had appointed Maximus to succeed him. While he never intended to help leaders or publish anything, Aurelius regularly wrote his thoughts on how he could personally improve his own leadership. Miraculously, the notes he wrote to himself were preserved and saved. Later these notes written in Greek were translated to English in the 17th century under the title of Meditations. Today, there are many followers, known as the stoic ethical followers, who refer to Marcus Aurelius as the founder of their ideology.

A variety of editions on Meditations have been translated to English. Ryan Holiday, a recent speaker at the UT leadership summit, wrote in his book, *The Obstacle is the Way*, how Marcus Aurelius used obstacles to his advantage. When one of his trusted generals Cassius had rebelled against him, he was disappointed, frustrated and resentful. He could have killed him and his co-conspirators but forgave them rather than let their blood stain his good name. Forgiving them was symbolically more beneficial to his reign

and his leadership.

A quote from Meditations may bring to light the thought process of this great general (Footnote: p. 28-29 Meditations The annotated Edition by Robin Waterfield 2021):

*"[I] At the start of the day tell yourself: I shall meet people who are officious, ungrateful, abusive, treacherous, malicious and selfish. In every case they have got like this because of their ignorance of good and bad. But I have seen goodness and badness for what they are, and I know that what is good is what is morally right, and what is bad is morally wrong. . .*

*Come on, make yourself a gift of this time. People who are over-interested in posthumous fame fail to take into consideration the fact that those who come after them will be no different from those they currently find objectionable, and just as mortal as well. "*

From Meditations, one can observe many lessons which are useful for leaders. A selection of 10 useful lessons from Marcus Aurelius' Meditations could be considered as a contribution to leadership and help one become a better leader.

### **All things in life have an ending.**

Nothing will last forever, even your own life. Life is short, even if one lives to become 100. Keeping that perspective for leaders is important. Whether

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## What can Roman Emperors Teach Today's Leaders

It is the presidency or even a kingdom, there will be a time that it will end. Knowing this will put a perspective on the job at hand and doing the important stuff first.

### **Focus on the task at hand.**

It does not matter what people think of you or who they are. Focus on whatever you are doing whether it is art, empowering others or finishing up a task. Remember there is limited time on Earth for everyone. In leadership, doing the right thing is the most important.

### **The truth is that one shapes his or her own reality.**

You can be a successful businessman who made millions but are suffering because you feel like a failure or living poorly under a bridge but are completely content and full of gratitude. Look at the positive side of every challenge.

### **Doing less excellently is better than doing a lot with mediocrity.**

By not extending ourselves we can do away with superfluous tasks or tasks that have lesser value, and one can feel a better sense of

accomplishments. Learning to say "no" is important for leaders.

### **Be resilient.**

Strong leaders know bad things are all around us. We sometimes call it negative energy. One must fight negativity with a positive force. Whether in academics or in industry, it requires a lot of courage to struggle against negative forces. Marcus Aurelius tells us we are stronger than we think.

### **Be a force for good for humanity.**

Is there anything more important than doing good to help others live a better life? The purpose of a good leader is to help others achieve more or make things better. Business leadership is to make better products or give better services for mankind. Why would someone want to be a leader if they are not making the world a better place?

### **Complaining doesn't work.**

Much more can be achieved if we change our ways rather than complain. If you are not satisfied with your job, you can change your job or figure a way to improve the work you are doing. Everyone has a limited means, and you should strive to do the best with what you have. Try to solve a problem by being a good entrepreneur or do something to harness the limitations in a positive way.

### **Be happy with the blessings of life anywhere.**

Happiness is a state of mind. No matter how much money you have, there will be people that have more than you. No matter how successful you are in business, there will be others who are more successful. Consider the fact that you are blessed with so many positive things that when you start counting it is always way more than the negative.

### **Power and wealth don't necessarily bring happiness.**

Remember all those who were greedy in life and pushed the boundaries of fortune in terms of fame, or with enemies they made? Ask yourself: Where is that fortune now? They are all gone with time and people don't even remember them.

### **Don't judge or criticize others.**

When you see a deficiency in someone or his or her work, do not judge them poorly. Surely you have deficiencies too, even if you don't know you have them. The best way is to try to help them overcome it in a kind, non-judgmental way and seek to improve your own deficiencies too. If someone mistreats you, try to understand why, and you will see that, in fact, you may feel sorry for them because they don't understand we are all in this together.

Some 2,000 years ago many principles of good leadership were there as they are today!



*Statue of Marcus Aurelius on the Capitoline Hill, Rome, Italy.*

## Navigating Through Uncertainty

By Bella L. Galperin, Ph.D., Dana Professor of Management and Senior Associate Director, TECO Energy Center for Leadership

On Wednesday, March 17, 2021, Andrew Wright, CEO and managing partner of Franklin Street, delivered an inspiring presentation via Zoom as part of the TECO Energy Center for Leadership Speaker Series. The title of the presentation was “*Navigating Through Uncertainty*.” In the last year and a half, learning how to steer your organization through rough waters has become increasingly important.

John Allen Paulos, an American mathematician, once noted that “uncertainty is the only certainty there is, and knowing to live with insecurity is the only security.” In general, the literature shows that living with uncertainty is challenging. That’s because we are hardwired to overestimate threats and underestimate the ability to handle them in order to increase survival. Our brains perceive ambiguity as a threat, and then try to protect us by focusing on creating certainty. Research has shown that job uncertainty negatively impacts our health even more than actually losing our job (Robinson, 2020).

While evolution has shaped us to resist uncertainty, it may be even more effective not to create certainty. The reality is that we do not know what the future will bring. We must recognize that improbable situations, like a pandemic, will disrupt our routine and change our plans. Wright discussed three factors that can help us navigate through uncertainty: preparedness, (informed) risk taking and a growth mindset.

**Preparedness.** Wright explained that navigating through uncertainty is primarily about preparedness. Wright noted that “it’s about doing the things that you need to do on the front end so when crisis hits or when you have some difficult waterways, you’re able to navigate it because of all that work that you put into it.” Specifically, past experiences can be valuable in assisting people with preparedness. Not only can reflecting on our

previous jobs and experiences be beneficial, but so can going above and beyond in our jobs during a disruption. “I’m certainly navigating uncertainty. I don’t know what the future holds but I look around me and I find people that are in it together,” noted Wright. A culture of collaboration can especially play a key role in building team building skills and community within an organization.

**Risk taking.** Taking risks can also assist in navigating through uncertainty. As an entrepreneur, Wright had to take numerous risks during his career. Rather than waiting for the stars to perfectly align in the sky, he stressed the importance of having faith in oneself and focusing on the building blocks that serve as the foundation to help you succeed. Wright noted that “there’s a group of people that want to have everything figured out and everything thought through before they make the first move, we call that analysis paralysis. Spending so much time thinking about it, you never actually make a move. But you have to be able to proceed, and then adapt.”

People should take the informed risks by betting on themselves. Wright recalled the time in his life during mid-2008, when he was in his 20s and had the option to either work for a stable large company or bet on himself to become an entrepreneur. While the easier decision would have been the safest route, Wright decided upon the entrepreneurial route and started building his business during the recession despite precarious situation at the time. Wright, however, confessed that that he would “be lying if I said that it didn’t cross my mind (to take the stable route). But in entrepreneurship, just because nothing ever works out to the plan doesn’t mean that it’s bad.”

**Growth Mindset.** Finally, Wright noted the importance of embracing a growth mindset. A growth mindset is based on the belief that your talents and abilities can be cultivated and



Bella L. Galperin

developed through your actions and efforts. Some characteristics of a growth mindset include: the belief that mistakes are an essential part of learning, failures are seen as opportunities

to learn, and embracing challenges. Rather than adopting a fixed mindset, a growth mindset helps you maximize your potential since you are less worried about failing, and hence put more energy on learning and developing skills. Wright noted that “adapting that growth mindset in all that you do, in all places, is important.” Rather than working for money and getting a job, he noted the importance of working to develop skills to build a career.

In the beginning of the pandemic, Wright emphasized the importance of having a growth mindset in his organization. He recognized the challenges in pivoting to remote work, especially for those who were new to the organization. Since new hires were unfamiliar with established work routines, it was difficult to train someone over Zoom. While the process was hard to navigate and learn, Wright was able to adapt to the new world because of a growth mindset. “You can learn something from everybody, everywhere,



Andrew Wright, CEO and Managing Partner of Franklin Street

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## Navigating Through Uncertainty

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Wright is grateful for the opportunity to undertake a range of business activities. As an entrepreneur, he learned about employment and payroll taxes and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations to name a few. He quickly recognized the importance of developing his skill set rather than only focusing on generating income. When asked why, Wright responded, "Because it's a marathon, not a sprint, and I think sometimes people get lost on always thinking about the next step."

In conclusion, navigating your organization through rough waters can be challenging. Similar to marine navigation, leaders need to decide where they want to go and follow an intended course. Just as boaters need to recognize the unpredictability of weather and the limitations of forecasting, leaders need to accept the uncertain and dynamic business context. While navigating through storms are not easy, three factors (increased preparedness, informed risk taking, and a learning mindset) can

help navigate through uncertainty.

Wright develops and defines strategic goals and major initiatives for Franklin Street while overseeing its collaborative dynamic verticals. Under his leadership, the company has grown throughout the Southeast through thousands of transactions totaling billions of dollars. In addition to his role at Franklin Street, Wright has diverse business interests spanning several different industries. When not working, he enjoys golf and spending time with his wife and their five children.

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### References

Robinson, B. (2020). The psychology of uncertainty: How to cope with COVID-19 anxiety. Forbes, March 12, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2020/03/12/the-psychology-of-uncertainty-how-to-cope-with-covid-19-anxiety/?sh=2792e1e3394a>

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## Leadership: Engagement, Connection and Adaptability

By Dominique Walker, Coordinator of Operations, Sykes College of Business

The TECO Energy Center for Leadership has continued to provide engaging programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. From keeping up with the bi-annual speaker series events to creating customized leadership programs for local organizations, the center has done its best to be flexible and stay engaged with University of Tampa students and the Tampa Bay community.

In an effort to stay connected with the Tampa Bay community, in July 2020, the center launched the Learn and Lead: Leading in the New Normal series. This program was taught over a six-week period, fully remote. Following the success of the Leading in the New Normal online program, the center

decided to continue the Learn and Lead series with two new programs: Navigating Cybersecurity, Foundations for Leaders (May 2021) and Leading in a Post-COVID World, Certificate in Resilient Leadership (July 2021).

Large gatherings of people were not possible this past year, so the center transitioned all speaker events to either a virtual delivery or limited in-person attendees while streaming live on Zoom. This two-pronged approach worked very well for the Leadership Speaker Series event in March 2021.

Following success of the Sykes Hall of Fame



Dominique Walker

Business Speaker Series was the spring Speaker Series event featuring Andrew Wright, founder and CEO of Franklin Street. Franklin Street is a full service commercial real estate

firm founded in 2006. This event was held entirely on Zoom and drew a "crowd" of 175 online participants. The change to a virtual presentation style rather than face-to-face allowed attendees to ask questions throughout the presentation via Q&A chat, rather than waiting until the end of the presentation. Wright's expertise in real estate and advice for navigating through uncertainty

# TAMPA BAY LEADERSHIP REVIEW

A PUBLICATION OF THE TECO ENERGY CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP



*Protect My Car graduates from the Modern Advances in Leadership Certificate program.*

resonated with the community attendees and UT students alike. Cameron Weber, a UT student majoring in international business and finance, said that as a finance-focused student with a strong interest in commercial real estate, the webinar inspired him to broaden his search for internships and career paths. "Providing students the opportunity to list and talk to real-world professionals helps immensely, whether it be for networking, career direction, or simply the purpose of learning," he said.

The TECO Center for Leadership was also able to stay involved in the Tampa Bay business community through two customized leadership programs for Protect My Car and Tampa General Hospital. Leadership topics range from subjects such as "Current Issues in Leadership," "Multigenerational Implications for the Future @ Work," "Advancing Your Emotional Intelligence" and much more. If you are interested in the Modern Advances in Leadership certificate or any customized program at your company, you can submit an inquiry at [www.ut.edu/cfl](http://www.ut.edu/cfl) or reach out directly to Bella Galperin, senior associate director of TECO Energy Center for Leadership, at [bgalperin@ut.edu](mailto:bgalperin@ut.edu).

The center is continuing its effort to stay engaged

in the upcoming fall and spring semesters with new events upcoming. On October 13, 2021, the center will continue with its biannual leadership Speaker Series event with the fall Speaker Series featuring Bob Johnston, Chairman of the Board and CEO of Front Burner Brands. This event will be masked, in person attendance. Following that, the center will begin gearing up for the 2022 Leadership Summit scheduled in February and the spring Speaker Series event in March.



*Bob Johnston, Chairman of the Board and CEO of Front Burner Brands*

# SAVE THE DATE

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## TECO ENERGY CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP UPCOMING EVENTS



### **Leadership Speaker Series**

Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2021  
Vaughn Center, Crescent Club, 9th Floor  
4:30-5:30 p.m.

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### **Leadership Summit**

Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2022  
Vaughn Center, Crescent Club, 9th Floor  
7:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

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### **Leadership Speaker Series**

Wednesday, March 23, 2022  
Vaughn Center, Crescent Club, 9th Floor  
4:30-5:30 p.m.

Wednesday,  
Oct. 13, 2021  
4:30-5:30 p.m.

The University of Tampa  
Vaughn Center  
9th Floor, Crescent Club

## QUESTIONS?

Contact:  
Dominique Walker  
Coordinator of Operations  
Sykes College of Business  
[dwalker@ut.edu](mailto:dwalker@ut.edu)  
(813) 257-3782

## KNOWING WHO YOU ARE: THE ROLE CULTURE PLAYS IN UNIFYING THE ORGANIZATION

### BOB JOHNSTON

*CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD  
AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,  
FRONT BURNER*



Bob Johnston started his first job with the Melting Pot when he was 14 and was bitten by the hospitality bug. As a result, Johnston literally grew up in the business and cannot see doing anything else. As Johnston likes to say, "This is my first and last job." Johnston oversees three affiliated dynamic and niche-specific brands including the Melting Pot®, Melting Pot Social®, and Oronzio® Honest Italian. Johnston continues to lead the Melting Pot brand on an evolution creating memories and the Perfect Night Out® for every guest.

**This event is free for students, faculty and guests.**

**Limited Seating. Reservations required.**

**RSVP: [www.ut.edu/cfl/speakerseries/](http://www.ut.edu/cfl/speakerseries/)**

## TECO ENERGY CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP

For program details, contact the TECO Energy Center for Leadership  
(813) 257-3782 | [cfl@ut.edu](mailto:cfl@ut.edu) | [ut.edu/cfl](http://ut.edu/cfl)



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Dana Professor of Management  
Senior Associate Director

**Deirdre Dixon, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor of Management  
Associate Director

**Stephanie Thomason, Ph.D.**

Professor of Management  
Associate Director

**Dominique Walker**

Coordinator  
Sykes College of Business Operations