

## The Chaos Spiral

So, in the last session, you saw my story, and you heard a little bit about why we do what we do here at Guidestone.

For years, in our work with leaders and our consulting work, we heard leaders say some of the same things to us over and over again. They said, “I’m overwhelmed”, or “I’m stuck”, or “I’m frustrated”. And hearing these things from people who are at all levels of organizations and all types of organizations, something doesn’t seem right.

How is it that someone who runs a business out of their home – a small business, a stay-at-home mom or dad – how is it that they’re experiencing the same challenges that an executive at a Fortune 50 company is experiencing?

What we learned after looking at many, many different points of data and listening over, and over again to people as they explain their stories – stories in their work, and stories of their leadership and their teams; what we learned was that every decision that we make does one of two things.

Every decision that we make either simplifies or complicates.

And what we learned is that the majority of decisions that we’re making are complicating or introducing more complexity and chaos into our life, and our work, and our leadership.

As I thought about this, I remember years ago as I sat in a restaurant in South Atlanta, Georgia and I was scribbling things down in a napkin desperately trying to figure out what is the common theme – the common thread. I began thinking about every major setback that I had experienced, and the disasters that I had navigated together with so many other leaders and teams. Within a few moments, I scribbled down what became for us a core tool that we use, and it brought so much clarity to why people struggle in their life, in their work, and in their leadership.

I realized that every significant failure that I have experienced and every life tragedy that I have seen other people navigate – they follow the same process.

Every single time in every situation, it started with **distraction**.

We developed a vision, we began implementing that vision, and things were going well – and it's really in those times when things are going well that we begin to let things slip, or we begin to be less intentional and more accidental about how things move forward. We lose focus.

The thing that's interesting about this first step in the downward spiral is that we live in a world of distraction. There's so many messages coming at us, and so many things that are screaming for our attention, and that so many people need our attention and need our help and need our assistance – that's the world we live in.

It's easy for us to see that every moment of every day, we are bombarded with distraction – with interruption. If we can't figure out how to navigate distraction, we end up at the second level of the chaos spiral – **discomfort**.

This is where we begin asking, "Hey, something isn't quite right. What's going on?" We begin to notice something's going on. In fact, it may be a subconscious thing where we realize, "Hey, something's not quite right, but I'm so busy and I've got all of these plates spinning or all of these balls in the air. I can't give the attention to it that I need to right now, but I know, I'm aware that there's something going on that does not feel quite right." Discomfort.

If we don't address the challenge, if we don't address the downward spiral, at that point, we end up at the next phase which is **discontent**.

We begin to realize either on our own or with the help of our team, "Hey, this can't continue the way that we're going. I need something different." At this stage though, we often realize that we don't know what it is that we need different. We just know we need something different. We're not content with the way the direction, the trajectory that we're headed, and we have to do something different – which is really what brings us to the next phase. If we're not able to deal with the discontent, we get to **despair**.

We often become more aware of this phase or this stage of the chaos spiral because our team members are coming to us saying, "Hey, I'm not content to work in this environment anymore. I'm going to another part of the company." Or "I want you to do something different about my role", or "about my compensation", or "about the people

who work for me.” They are so discontented that they have reached the point of despair and say, “I can’t handle it like this anymore. Something has to be different.”

So, we’ve travelled from simple distractions to discomfort to discontent and to despair often very quickly without even having a chance to do something about it. Where our people and our teams or maybe even ourselves, have realized, I can’t take this anymore. Something has to be different. If we’re unable to address the challenges in those moments – in the moments of despair – if we’re unable to work fast enough for our teams, for our organizations, or even in our own particular setting, if we’re unable to make a difference, we end up where so many of us have been before. The last stage of the downward spiral – **disaster**.

It all falls apart.

I’ve been there – trying to work my way out of the downward spiral in the moment with everything going on around us at home, and at work, and outside of home and work. Trying to figure it out in the margins of life.

- I stayed up late
- I got up early
- I read all the books
- I listened to the podcasts
- I bought the courses
- I attended the conferences
- I worked with a coach

And nothing worked.

In fact, all of those things often brought more complexity and confusion to my life and work. I secretly wondered, is there something wrong with me? Am I just not cut out for leadership? In fact, as we’ve consulted with leaders all over the country, many of them have come to us and within a few weeks they’re ready to jump out of the leadership position. “Man, I don’t think this is for me.” And I too wondered if there was some problem deep inside that I’d never be able to conquer, and if I should just quit trying and if I should resign myself to just going to the office and doing my work for a paycheck.

For as long as I could remember, I had worked so hard, and it seemed like I could never get everything completely right – that I was never good enough. Even though we had significant turnarounds, even though we made significant progress, even though we had record progress, we would still find ourselves at the bottom of the chaos spiral and disaster.

I began to ask myself:

- What does all of this mean?
- Will we ever know what success really looks like?
- Do we even have a concept for what success is?
- Can I experience healthy margin?
- Can I experience fulfillment in my work?
- Can I have deep connection and relationship with people?
- Can I understand what that looks like and feels like?

What I needed was a simple, proven process and tools that would help me to experience dramatic improvements at home and at work. What I realized was, the answer is not in working harder, or working more, or working longer hours, or being away from family more.

There is a solution. And in the next session, we're going to look at the solution to the downward spiral and show you exactly how to simplify your life, your work, and your leadership.