



## The Difference Between Ordinary and Great Leadership

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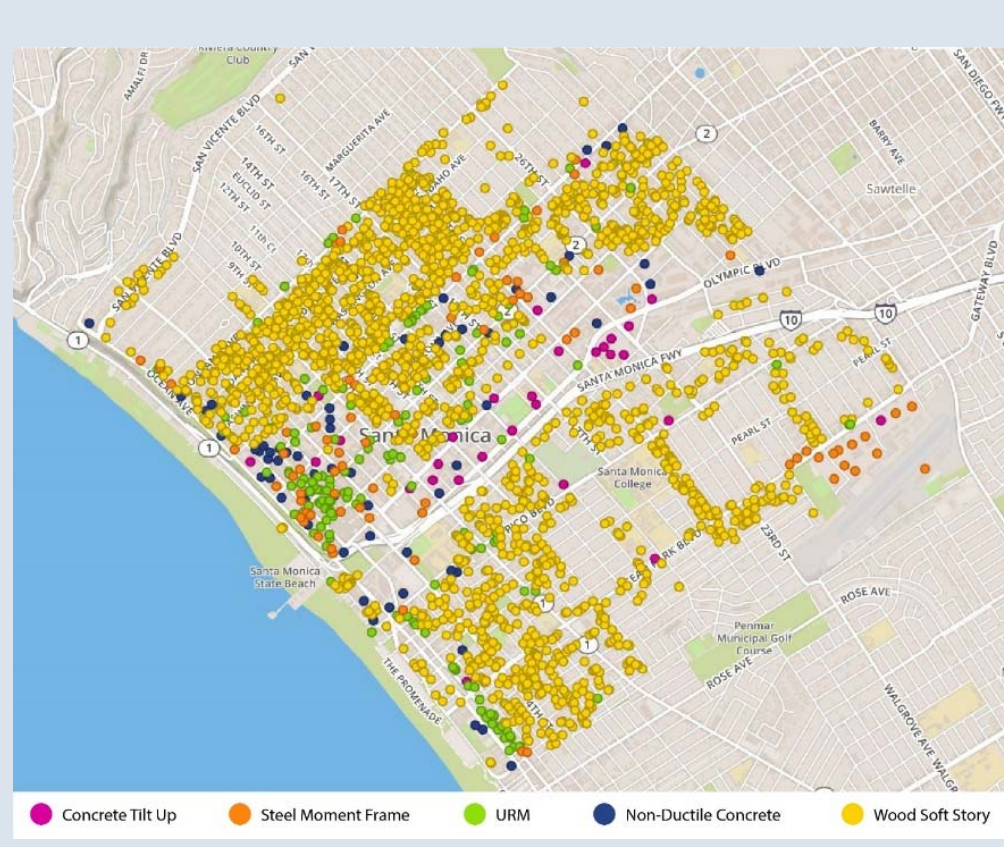
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Following devastating floods of 1935, when Houston's population was about 400,000, city leaders constructed two large reservoirs outside the city to act as detention ponds for future events. In the decades that followed, however, different leaders, more interested in capitalizing on the oil and gas boom, encroached upon these reservoirs, even permitting development within the basins themselves. Predictably, when Hurricane Harvey blew through Harris County in 2017, the reservoirs and the surrounding area filled with water, displacing thousands and causing more than \$125 billion in damage and economic loss. The New York Times wrote, "Resettling neighborhoods, making certain places off-limits to development, creating dikes and reservoirs is difficult, both financially and politically. It takes longer than most election cycles...Politicians want votes, not trouble."



Houston, following the floods of 2017

When the 1994 Northridge Earthquake struck, Santa Monica avoided a direct hit. Nonetheless, many unreinforced masonry, steel and multi-story wood framed buildings were damaged. Aware that it was only a matter of time before one of the faults under or nearer the city ruptured, city leaders passed regulations requiring the mandatory retrofit of the community's most vulnerable buildings. This culminated in a 2017 ordinance considered one of the nation's most extensive. Mayor Ted Winterer, said "We want to do as much as we can to limit the loss of life and infrastructure, so in the event of a disaster, we bounce back strong."



Vulnerable buildings, the city of Santa Monica

Resilience is a measure of how quickly a system bounces back from *chronic stresses* or *acute shocks*. The former are ongoing demands on a community, a company, even a family, that require the constant attention of leadership. Acute shocks are events that occur infrequently, like natural disasters, but can be devastating. Leaders often focus on addressing chronic stresses because the return is more immediate and the benefits accrue to them. Great leaders, however, know that their lasting legacy will be in part measured by how they thought about the long-term, and the economic and social security of future generations. Traits of great leaders are those we see in heroes: they make decisions not for themselves, but for others.

The examples of Houston and Santa Monica, or the example of the Houston of the 1940's and the Houston of today are tales of ordinary versus great leadership.

An objective of the US Resiliency Council is to help ordinary leaders become great leaders, using the strategy "Fear plus Hope and a Plan." Fear is a recognition that for acute shocks like earthquakes, hurricanes or floods, leaders must adopt a "when," not "if," mentality. An "if" mentality really means, "Will the event happen on my watch? While I'm mayor or CEO. While I own this home?" Great leaders understand that "when" the event happens, even "if" not on their watch, it will still affect hundreds or thousands of people. And to great leaders, the impact on future generations is as important as the impacts on their own.

Fear can spurn action but can often be paralyzing. When it comes to "acts of God," leaders often take a fatalistic or resigned approach. We can't prevent earthquakes or hurricanes, so if the "big one" hits what really can we do about it? The fallacy in this approach is an all or nothing perspective. The belief that if I cannot solve the entire problem, then why bother? There are few things that politicians like more than cutting ribbons upon a project's completion. I think of the building of ancient cathedrals in Europe that often took a hundred years. The duke or bishop that started the project was never able to cut the ribbon when the last stone was placed. But they saw bigger goal in what they were doing,

establish and implement a rating system for the performance of buildings in earthquakes and other natural hazards. The system is currently applicable to earthquake performance but the vision is for it address other hazards including wind, flood and blast. The USRC issues ratings, certifies practitioners and best practices, and technically reviews ratings shared with the public so its ratings are both credible and consistent.

Improving local community and regional resilience in natural and manmade disasters is a national imperative. Key to the success of this challenge is the need to understand the performance of the nation's building stock in terms of safety, repair cost and recovery. The vision of the USRC is to make the public more aware of their potential risks in natural disasters, and provide them with information to make better-informed decisions on owning, renting, leasing and insuring properties, so that market forces will drive the building design, and procurement process toward more resilient building design.



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