

LEADING THROUGH TURBULENT TIMES

by Bernadette Baynie



Bernadette Baynie highlights seven ways to navigate through turbulent times ahead in an evolving, 'new' corporate world.

We are currently living and working through one of the most turbulent times in modern history.

The coronavirus pandemic has turned our personal and professional lives upside down, in ways that we had never imagined.

Certainty in our corporate world has been replaced with uncertainty. Calm has been replaced with calamity and desire has been replaced with doubt. The many "freedoms" that we once took for granted in our lives, have been shelved. This global crisis, remains highly unpredictable, impacting our lives in so many ways – including - socially, mentally, emotionally, financially, politically and geographically.

The relevant question for any leader right now, is not: what shall we do tomorrow? But, more importantly: what shall we do today in order to be prepared for tomorrow.

I genuinely believe that we will get through this challenging crisis together and that there is a light at the end of the tunnel for us all. We will do so, by stepping up, looking fear in the face and supporting each other in ways that we, perhaps, have not done before. Ultimately, it will come down to our capacity to lead, not just ourselves, but our people through the challenging months ahead. And it will take courage, confidence and conviction to do so, as Eleanor Roosevelt once said:

"You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience, in which you really stop to look fear in the face... You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

I believe that there could not be a better time in your personal and professional life to step up, irrespective of your circumstances. You can use your great tenacity and leadership

skills to make a profound and positive impact upon the people around you.

Here are seven ways to step up and support your people and organisation successfully through these turbulent times:

1. YOUR CORPORATE VALUES ARE YOUR ANCHOR IN A STORM

As a first step, use your organisation's corporate values to anchor you and keep you grounded during the storm. Such corporate values can protect you and your enterprise from ensuing turbulence and uncertainty. So, make the time to review and remember each of one of them. Share a refresh session of them with your team. They are valuable signposts that can direct you all through the uncharted waters ahead. They can also guide you to a safe haven, if you model them consistently in everything that you do.

2. TAKE CONTROL AT THE HELM

You may not be able to predict the future, but you can certainly take full control of how you and team react to the evolving crisis around you.

People follow leaders who have the confidence and fortitude to lead and direct them out of a crisis, such as this one. So, take full control by promptly assembling the right people around you and empowering them with appropriate decision-making capabilities. This framework will ensure that key decisions are made in a timely manner by the people that count.

3. PROMPTLY CARRY OUT A FULL INSPECTION OF YOUR SHIP

If you have not done so already, swiftly audit your top 10 key departmental matters, projects, issues and risks and repeat this assessment on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Identify the likely short-term and long-term impacts of the current crisis on your: company, people, clients, and most importantly, you. Prepare a report on all of these matters and

share it with your boss and team to keep everyone updated. Communication is paramount and remember – you can't consistently "expect", what you don't regularly "inspect".

Also, avoid weighing down your people with any unrealistic deadlines, as they work from home etc. Be sensitive to their situation and needs. Remain flexible and open to re-prioritising the turnaround of their matters, as and when required. As the McKinsey team highlighted in their recent website article: Leadership in a crisis: Responding to the coronavirus outbreak and future challenges:

"It requires leaders to overcome the normalcy bias, which can cause them to underestimate both the possibility of [the] crisis and the impact that it could have."

4. ACT SWIFTLY BUT NOT RUSHED

Having a sense of urgency is highly valuable as a leader, but acting hurriedly during a crisis, can make your people somewhat nervous. Acknowledge openly to them that you and your fellow executives may not have all of the right answers, initially. Don't be afraid to tell them that your current response may not be your final one. Let them know that such decision making has been made in the best interests of your enterprise, as a whole, including them, based upon prevailing and available information.

Keep Calm And Composed. Stay centered and connected with your people in today's "virtual" corporate world. Master the use of relevant technologies and apps, whilst social distancing, to remain highly visible and united with your people. This will help to reduce doubts and uncertainties and enable you to steer your ship, confidently, through the turbulent waters ahead.

Check in with your organisation's crisis management team regularly and obtain status updates on what's happening on the frontline and beyond it. Remain composed but fluid and be ready to change your course rapidly, in response to any new information

that they provide. Develop an agile approach to your work and be ready to adapt to new ways of working and leading your team, as the great leadership author Peter Drucker once said: "The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic." It's also important to be vigilant and steady as a leader, in the face of any potential downsizing, restructuring and lay-offs that may be hovering on the horizon.

5. CREATE A SAFE HAVEN IN THE FACE OF CHANGE

Adapting to newer ways of working has its challenges but it also can be rewarding too. Making the time to establish a warm and open virtual team working environment can build trust and enhance team communication, connectivity, and harmony. Give meaningful support to any team members who may be impacted by the virus, directly or indirectly. Try to be as understanding and compassionate as possible and provide them with emotional support, where you can. Encourage them to raise issues and discuss their concerns openly, without any fear of repercussions. Also ensure, that team members who work from home, take regular breaks and switch off when required. Whilst leading your team virtually may be difficult at first, it can reap rewards if it is strategically and compassionately carried out.

6. ALWAYS LEAD BY EXAMPLE, REMAIN POSITIVE AND EXPRESS GRATITUDE

Leaders are often referred to as "dealers of hope", particularly during a crisis. Your people will be looking to you, as their leader, for emotional reassurance and confidence as you steer them forward through the uncharted waters ahead. Keep their morale and motivation high. Repeatedly express to them your genuine appreciation for their work and the output that they have achieved, despite prevailing pressures.

Seek to always lead your people with sincere optimism and a positive outlook for the future.

This is leadership at its best and it will help to diminish any prevailing fears that they may have.

CONCLUSION

You, like all executives, are operating in a "new" virtual corporate world that is evolving as we speak. Your success as a leader will always be dependent upon your authenticity and commitment to both your enterprise and your people, irrespective of the circumstances. But you are not bulletproof and may not have all the right answers right now. Take comfort in the knowledge that no one else has either.

One of the positive outcomes of this crisis is that it has enabled us to create new and sustainable ways of living and working together. It has fostered a culture of mindfulness, kindness, and compassion in our work environment on a scale that we have not seen before.

There are many wonderful ways that you can personally support your team and organisation through these extraordinary times. Follow your intuition and always face adversities in your role with a compassionate and courageous heart. Believe that there are better days ahead beyond this crisis - and those around you will be inspired to believe it too! As Walt Whitman once said: "Keep your face always toward the sunshine - and shadows will fall behind you. "

Written by Bernadette Baynie
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www.bernadettebaynie.com



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