

## ENVISIONING A DIFFERENT WORLD BEYOND THE VIRUS



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Someway, somehow the Human SARS coronavirus (aka Covid-19) will eventually take its place on the ash heap of history. Maybe it will be through modified behaviors, a scientific miracle, or some astonishing intervention by Nature, but we will prevail – and we will all have changed as a result. As we mend grieving lives, as society returns to more normal rhythms, and as we get back to work to restore a devastated global economy, how leaders lead and how they communicate will need to change as well.

Here are a few reflections from my home office:

### **Leaders have a choice**

There are defining moments in our careers that define us. How we choose to lead at these crossroads is our choice. As we go through the fire we can melt with panic and become victims of circumstance, or we can courageously choose to be forged by the flame. Now is the time for leaders – from the C-suite to the factory floor – to think about how their management styles could change to better serve employees and customers. When this crisis started most of us were “too busy” to take the time to self-reflect. It may be incongruous, but this moment is a gift to think carefully about your leadership style. We all have a choice.

### **Remember why you do what you do**

As we return to work, it's a perfect time to underscore the value that your company brings to its customers or communities. Highly engaged employees want to make a difference; they want their companies to make a difference. We all want to be part of something meaningful and

successful. Imagine the productivity, innovation and results that can be attained if our teams are truly driving the mission. Remind your people that what they do matters.

### **The narrative is yours**

If you don't tell your story, someone else will fill in the blanks. Now is the time to be transparent and tell the truth, sharing what you know and admitting what you don't. You may not have all the facts, but in times like these more frequent communications can build or maintain trust faster than waiting until you know everything. Don't wait for the vacuum of silence to be distorted by noisy assumptions and misinformed rumors. The cadence of content is yours to manage.

### **Listen Longer and Louder**

People will be closely tuned in to see if their leaders hear them. They'll want to know if you grasp what they've been through. Are you asking questions to better understand and appreciate their fears and concerns? Do you recognize what their world is like? Do you care about their health, about their family's stress? Are you listening to learn and then acting authentically? Listening is the secret to discovery.

### **Don't be a Zoom Zombie**

The video platforms and social media we've used during the Covid-19 crisis have been an effective way to keep us networked and working. And many companies are seriously thinking about extending the use of telecommuting beyond the pandemic. This is all the more reason to think about how to humanize our connections. The technologies that bind us also separate us. As we head back to our cubicles, labs and workspaces, leaders would be wise to remember that what truly wires us together is human connectivity. Balance your use of technology with a dose of humanity. Know when to be a Luddite and when to be a digital wizard. As someone once said, technology is a useful tool, but a dangerous master.

### **Change is inevitable**

No doubt the forces of this pandemic have unleashed changes that leaders need to be prepared for. There will be an amplified focus on health and safety. Rigid business models will be replaced by agile ways of working and serving customers. Recent research suggests that employees often trust their employers more than their governments. Working from home will become routine for many. Employee communications will gain in value. The vocabulary of corporate values will shift to embrace words like empathy, kindness, and personal health.

The scourge of Covid-19 is not yet over, but its potential scars and change-lessons should be on every leader's mind as they envision the world beyond the virus. Resilient and purposeful leaders will avoid the "victim trap" and prepare for the future.