



Leading in the Post COVID Recession

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Leading in the Post COVID Recession

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Our global coaching practice has yielded some great insights into the changing demands on leaders at all levels. Although good leadership fundamentals have largely been unchanged for centuries, the most effective skill mix for our new normal is distinctive.

As COVID concerns recede and the world moves closer to what we could call 'normal'- human contact, hybrid working, maskless gatherings, and lifted spirits. Not so fast! Most experts say that recession is here. Q1 posted a -1.4% GDP. The end of Q2 is just around the corner and it's looking like it will tell the same story. Two consecutive quarters of negative GDP spells recession. Not that you haven't already seen it at the pump, supermarket, and stock market but soon it will be official.

Ok, so what? At the end of 2021, average weekly wages were up 5.9% across the country. Retail spending grew each month over the previous month from January to April 2022. Unemployment is at 3.6%, and companies are lavishing benefits on workers to attract and retain them. It still feels like a golden age. As we pivot into a new post-COVID era and economic slowdown, it's a great time to take stock of what we've learned during the pandemic and prepare for the leadership journey ahead. It's time to step up our game. Here are some of the lessons we learned during the pandemic, and some thoughts on how we can apply them going forward.

– The 3C's of Leadership

Over the last few years, leaders grappled with not just the pandemic, but also the consequences – worker shortages, supply chain issues, to name a couple. This on top of political divisiveness, a war in Europe, and in many places, extreme weather events which impacted day-to-day businesses. Burnout became and continues to be a major issue across levels and divisions at millions of companies around the world.

INSIGHT

Calm, consistency and clarity carry organizations through crisis. Especially during times of crisis and uncertainty we look for a steady foundation.

ACTION

Great leaders provide a predictable style, consistent set of principles, and clarity of vision. They acknowledge the crisis, whatever it may be at the time, and show a steadiness in words, actions, and body language. They communicate with key stakeholders more frequently, seek to connect personally, and share what they do and do not know.

– The ‘easy button’ is not our friend. Resilience is.

INSIGHT

We’ve spent the last two years deepening our understanding of, and operationalizing, optimal brain performance. We recognize that for many, possibly most people, our needs for physical movement and social connection have been relatively unmet working remotely. While remote work is often valued by employees and managers alike, in-person interaction is key to effective leadership. This one may raise some eyebrows, but consider the following.

People are evolved to be as energy-efficient in their thoughts and actions as possible. It’s how we’ve been so successful as a species. However, in over a century of over-abundance, it’s not working out to our long-term benefit, because it ignores other social and physical aspects of leadership and corporate culture building.

While remote work is so much easier than dressing to go out, commuting to work, or finding parking, in many cases, it created new or exacerbated existing problems. Holed up at home, in a flat in an exotic land, or a van in the mountains, we’re isolated from broad daily social interaction and trapped with our refrigerators. Rates of depression, alcoholism, suicide, and domestic violence rose dramatically as a percentage of the population during this time. The vast majority of public-school parents in California (83%) are reporting that their children are falling behind academically due to the pandemic, which no doubt means new social and academic adjustment challenges down the road. The number of people taking mental health screenings increased 500% in 2021 from 2019, and 45% of those were youth ages 11-17. Because we’re naturally drawn to social situations, we ended up sporadically connecting with people despite the pandemic, but this socialization occurred outside of work.

Executive effectiveness isn’t in isolation, we have found that resilience and leadership are strongly tied to a balance in mental, physical, and spiritual health. Which is why we take a holistic approach with our coaching practice. According to a [2021 Challenger survey](#), 80% of Human Resources executives said “Resilience” was a critical leadership capability in the post-COVID era.

ACTION

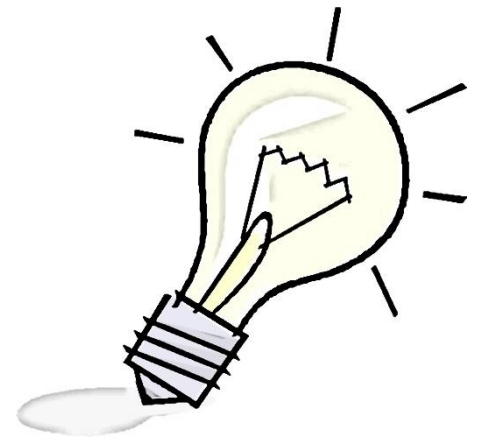
As we move through the COVID-era, teams are now often made up of remote and in-person workers and forging those connections among team members is imperative. Perhaps it is monthly happy hours or team events to build morale. Consider incorporating “1 good thing” into your team meetings. It’s a gratitude practice in which each member of the team offers something good that has happened to them recently. There are layers of psychology at play with this exercise, not the least of which is creating a positive association with the team, manager, and company.

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- ▶ ***Leaders who are successful in navigating these challenges seek out resilience-building insights and actions. More new and established leaders are requesting resilience-related development now more than ever.***
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– Be the Light

INSIGHT

Culture starts at the top. The higher the position, the greater the impact of your actions, visible emotions, and words. People consciously and subconsciously cue off of leadership. A client of ours, also a CEO of Fortune 1000 company, got food poisoning over a long weekend. Although still feeling the effects they came into the office on Monday to prepare for a board meeting and a critical earnings release and to demonstrate their commitment to the organization. They looked pale, depleted, and upset, causing team members, cueing off of their body language, to think the worst. Rumors swirled internationally about an unexpectedly bad quarter, likely layoffs and other business doom and gloom, none of which was founded. A bad burrito – yes, distressed financials and forecasts – no.



ACTION

Effective leaders have developed a keen self-awareness and convey a sense of capability and confidence that inspires others to follow them. They control their verbal and non-verbal messages by smiling, walking with confidence, managing their words, tone, and communication timing. Also, it's o.k. to take a sick day, which shows others it's o.k. for them to do so too.

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- ▶ ***Smiling and walking confidently is a great mind-body hack. When you do it, you actually become happier, less stressed, and more confident. Our physiology informs our psychology, and vice-versa.***
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– MBWA

INSIGHT

“Managing by walking around” is as critical now as ever. Virtual and in-person teams are looking for connection and direction. Working together, we help guide each other’s actions, validate our contributions, course correct, and read the social dynamics.

ACTION

A recent LinkedIn survey found 79% of employees would leave their job if they did not feel appreciated. Great leaders connect with their high performers regularly to reinforce their value, ask for their insights, and forge social bonds and conduct more formal 'stay interviews' every 3 – 6 months. They ensure they are spending their time with their most critical talent, and not just the 'squeaky wheels'.

When we are in the office, discipline yourself to get out of your office 1 – 2 times/day for at least 10 minutes to walk the office, say "hi." The movement will improve your energy, attitude, judgement, and overall cognitive performance. The connection with others allows you to spread positivity and a can-do attitude and reminds people why we are in-person. You also get a better real-time sense of how the organization is doing. Virtual teams, plan weekly happy hours (hint: not late Friday afternoon).

Leaders that thrived during COVID used most of the skills listed above and those that struggled did not. These are enduring leadership principles and during challenging times, their value is most critical.

The above list is intended to be a reminder and starting point. Leadership is a verb, not a noun. Using these Leadership skills will improve yourself, your team, your organization and will begin to put the fun back in the fundamentals.



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