

LEADERSHIP. NOT CANCELLED.

Leading in Challenging Times

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— *intentional* —
L E A D E R S

leadership, on purpose

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PRACTICE COMPASSION

01





COMPASSION IS KEY

In "normal" times, emotional intelligence (EQ) is a significant differentiator for leadership success.

Meaning, leaders who have it are more successful. And according to Travis Bradberry (one of my favorite EQ gurus), leaders with high EQ tend to make more money (*mic drop!*).

Emotional intelligence means the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically.

With emotional reactions currently on overdrive, as leaders, we cannot afford to ignore this skill set.

This goes for us. And others. As we adjust to the new workplace and marketplace challenges, emotions matter.

Even if you're one of those leaders who relies on logic more heavily than emotions (*I get you!*) now is the time to upskill yourself.

Strengthening your EQ starts with being aware of your own emotions (in the moment) and managing your reactions thoughtfully.

You have a "neuron wifi."

Daniel Goleman's work on "emotional contagion" confirms that, like COVID-19, our emotions are contagious. From a work perspective, the most powerful person in the group has the most powerful impact.

In your team, that means you.

Managing your emotions mindfully and constructively during this pandemic will have a significant impact on your team's performance.





Why EQ is vital right now.

Our brain is amazing. When in danger, hormones are released to keep us safe. In the days of the Tyrannosaurus Rex, this was helpful. In the workplace today, not so much.

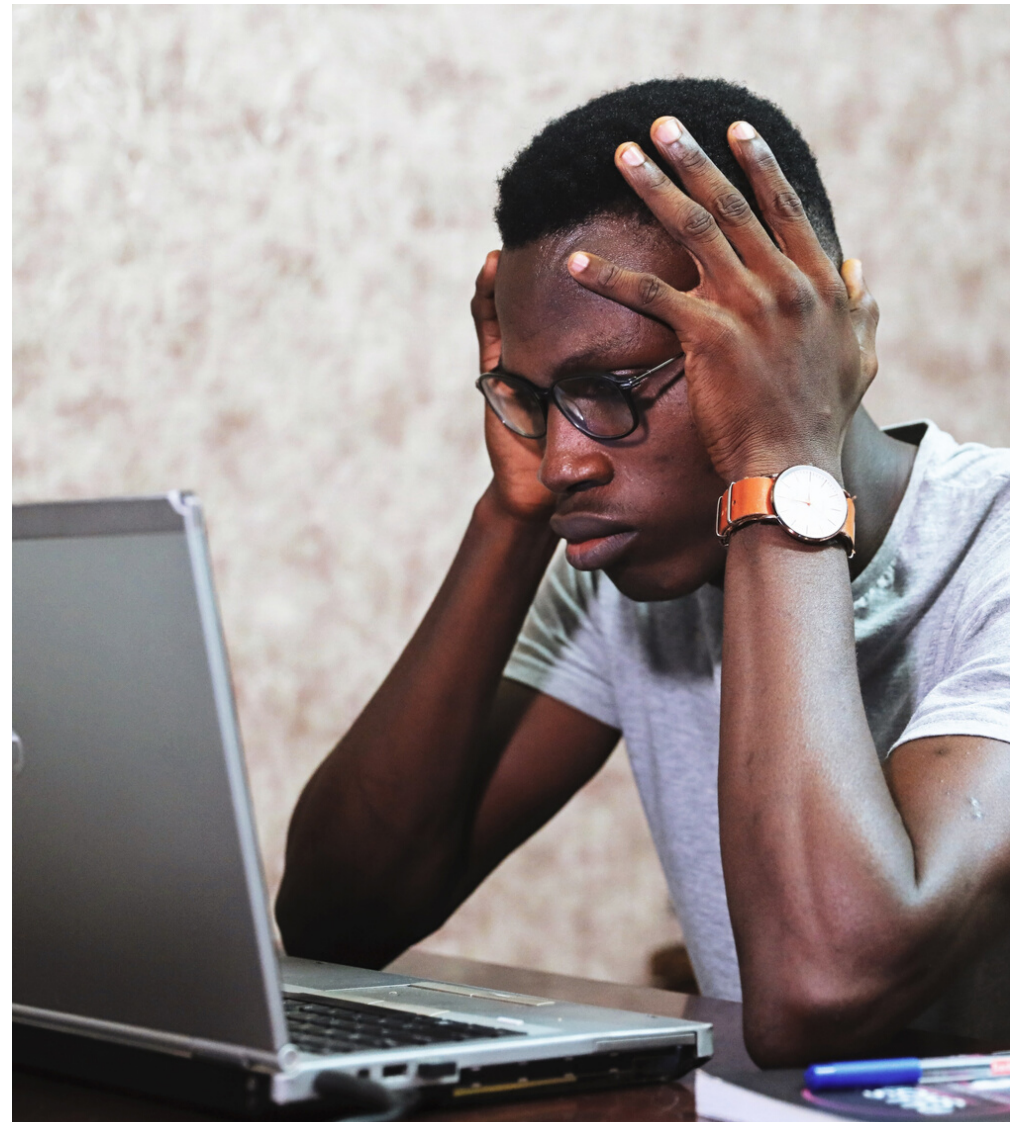
Two key stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol can help us to perform at our best under stress.

Adrenaline gives us that energy boost, it increases our heart rate and elevates our blood pressure.

Cortisol on the other hand, suppresses functions that are not critical in fight or flight situations (again, think T-Rex), like our digestive, growth and reproductive systems.

However, when stress is ever present (for example, a global pandemic, loss of work, or work from home, children at home, physical illness or fear of), our bodies becomes overexposed to these hormones. This puts us at increased risk for health problems, including:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Digestive problems
- Headaches
- Heart disease
- Sleep problems
- Weight gain
- Memory & concentration impairment



Managing emotions constructively means recognizing them, acknowledging them--but now allowing them to derail us.

Leadership right now means understanding the physical toll that emotions can have on all of us. And to understand that we can manage our emotions by managing our mind. This means first recognizing an emotional reaction in our body, then identifying the thought that triggered it.

Focusing on mental health will help to reduce the risks of chronic stress that many of us are experiencing. We all know the common tactics for managing stress. But now is the time to practice them intentionally and consistently.

This means, breathing deeply...meditation, mindfulness, yoga, physical exercise...and even positive visualization (*which top athletes do to manage their anxiety!*).

Summary & Tips



1. Acknowledge emotions: Yours and others.

Be aware of your emotions and understand the impact they have on us. Work through emotions, choosing calm thoughts when possible. Your emotions set the stage for others. Check in with your team on the emotions they are experiencing. Listen. You don't have to agree or even understand the emotions; you are building trust and demonstrating compassion by listening and acknowledging them. Listening means giving your undivided and full attention (*no multi-tasking!*). Use video conferencing to "see" body language which gives us significant visual cues to others' emotions. Some of your employees may not feel comfortable sharing their feelings (*preferring a root canal*), your job is to seek to understand.

And because I can't help myself, just a few other DO NOT's:

- Do NOT say, "I understand." This can trigger defensiveness ("*No you don't understand!*") and puts the emphasis on *you*, rather than the individual you are empathizing with!
- Avoid judgment. You may react very differently than someone else, or may even be confused as to why someone is experiencing a particular emotion. Honor their perspectives no matter what.
- Don't try to problem solve with someone before you've acknowledged their emotions! Empathy first. And then more empathy. Only then do *you earn the right to problem solve* with them.

2. Focus on what you can control versus what you cannot control.

The Serenity Prayer is valued for a reason, it helps us to be cognizant of what we have the power to do. The emphasis here is on *action*. This practice helps us to feel empowered versus feeling like a victim. "I will do what I can to help my employees navigate the professional and personal challenges due to COVID-19," is focused on action and increases personal power. Anxiety and overwhelm tend to keep us stuck. (Limiting media consumption can also be a valuable strategy right now!)

3. Focus on gratitude.

It's challenging to focus on gratitude and despair simultaneously. Help your team focus on small wins. Positive customer stories. Impact. Progress. Results. Reinforce anything and everything positive that is happening personally and professionally. It matters.

BUILD COMPETENCIES

02





ADOPT A GROWTH MINDSET

Carol Dweck is the foremost expert on our mindsets, fixed and growth.

Seeing the current pandemic as an opportunity to learn about ourselves, our workplace, our employees, and our universe is an example of a growth mindset. Because those with a growth mindset tend to look at challenges as opportunities to learn (*i.e., and they think this process of learning is fun and motivating!*).

Learning has always been a critical component of effective leadership. But now there is a significant emphasis on it. Because no one was able to take the class, "*Leading in a Global Pandemic, COVID-19, 101.*"

We are learning as we go. How to work at home. How to balance work and family. How to serve customers new needs and challenges.

Learn and do. Try new things. Then learn and improve. Avoid focusing on perfection.

As a leader, you are the role model for learning. Being vulnerable and transparent about learning new skills, approaches and knowledge, sets the stage for your employees to do the same.

Share lessons learned in your team. Encourage both the sharing of successes and failures. Let your employees know its okay to admit they don't know how to do something. Then focus on learning it.





Change = Growth = Lead It



I've been teaching leaders about navigating change for decades. *[Spoiler Alert!]* It's hard. Statistics on successful change within organizations are bleak.

We are in the midst of one of the most challenging changes most of us will see in our lifetimes. Disruptions to family, work and life.

Generally speaking, some of the main pitfalls to successful change have to do with lack of clarity (i.e., where are we going and why?). Some have to do with execution (rather than over-engineering of change, I've seen more of the magical wand approach--ta da, we've changed! um, really? for example, we're all working at home...we're "done" or "we've closed our business, we're done."). Sustainable change doesn't work that way!

And let's talk people. Some change implementation pitfalls have to do with people. And fear. Change creates fear for many reasons, but a significant one is about the fear of not performing well. Though admittedly, this may be an unconscious fear.

You might hear an employee say, "I'm not afraid, I just think this is stupid and won't work!" Which fyi, may still be fear-based.

This fear is especially predominant if we've been in a role for a long time, we feel capable, confident, competent, successful. Change is a threat to our success. For example, a shift to working at home (e.g., I don't have the space, or the tools or the privacy, etc.).

An antidote to fear is knowledge and skills. So let's learn. Which, like change, is sometimes oversimplified. Because not everyone learns in the same manner and in the same timeframe. Learning is a process (remember when you first learned to play golf or manage a team?).

A useful way to think about learning is by considering the ladder of competency. It's been around forever, and it goes like this:

- Step 1 Unconscious Incompetence = I don't know what I don't know (strange example, but did you know touching your face would be linked to getting a virus?)
- Step 2 Conscious Incompetence = I now know I don't know something (oh, now I know that!)
- Step 3 Conscious Competence = I now know, but have to think hard about doing it right (I cannot stop touching my face!)
- Step 4 Unconscious Competence = I have mastered it and no longer have to think about execution (I don't have to think about not touching my face--this is not true yet!)

Note: Most adults get stuck around Step 3, because we don't like the feeling that we can't do something well. Especially at work. So we give up. And go back to our old ways. (My example is oversimplified, but you get the point.)

Summary & Tips



1. Embrace a growth mindset.

The current environment is filled with change. Change is hard. Many employees resist change. Sometimes resistance is fear based. Help employees to overcome their fear through learning.

Be the role model for learning. Be visible and transparent about your own growth goals. Set expectations with your team that learning is a priority.

2. Focus on key competencies.

Leaders:

- **Resilience:** Is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness. Having a flexible, adaptable, "*We can figure this out!*" perspective will serve you well as a leader.
- **Inclusion:** Inclusion means the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. In a remote workplace, definitions of diversity and inclusion may shift. Think about who may feel excluded. Or ask.
- **Big picture/External Focus:** Keep your team focused on the biggest priorities. Goals help to create focus. Focus can help to alleviate anxiety.

Employees (especially in work at home situations):

- **Self-motivation and discipline:** These competencies are essential to work at home. Performance will now be measured with results. Employees must be able to establish the needed parameters to accomplish goals. With children. Or family members that are ill. And that takes focus and discipline.
- **Problem solving:** Problem solving is one of the most complex cognitive competencies. It's a practice and requires sound critical thinking. Critical thinking isn't about thinking more, but thinking about thinking. It's about effective reasoning, based on logic, not emotions. It's about eliminating biases and recognizing assumptions. With all the problems that need to be solved with a *right now* urgency, this is a key area to strengthen. (For more information on coaching good problem solving, check out the [RED Model of Critical Thinking pages 5 & 7.](#))
- **Accountability:** Beyond getting work done, accountability means being available when needed (or communicating when you can't). It also means accepting ownership over results, accepting consequences--both good and bad.

ADOPT NEW PRACTICES

03





PROCESSES AND PRACTICES MATTER

There are traditionally four key functions of a manager, they are to: Plan, Organize, Lead & Control.

Management is about facilitating those four functions efficiently and effectively. With marketplace, workplace and workforce changes--your practices need to evolve. Quickly.

If you haven't already, it's time to do an inventory of current processes, practices and guidelines. What is working? What is not?

Why? Because as humans, we value certainty. Certainty right now feels elusive. We feel powerless. The irony is that we've never really had certainty, but we probably had more consistency, and more structure. So we felt we had more certainty.

As a leader, help to provide structure to increase the feelings of certainty. Many leaders are implementing small check in's at the beginning and end of each day with all team members. This provides feelings of connection, support and certainty. It gives stability.

"Look out the window and see what's visible but not yet seen."

-- Peter Drucker

Looking out the window (literally and figuratively) is scary right now. *But you need to run to the window!*

Focus first on the immediate horizon. Ensure employees have the infrastructure they need to perform.

Then look ahead.





Do an audit of your practices. Measure performance.

Consider how work gets done. And how it needs to evolve.

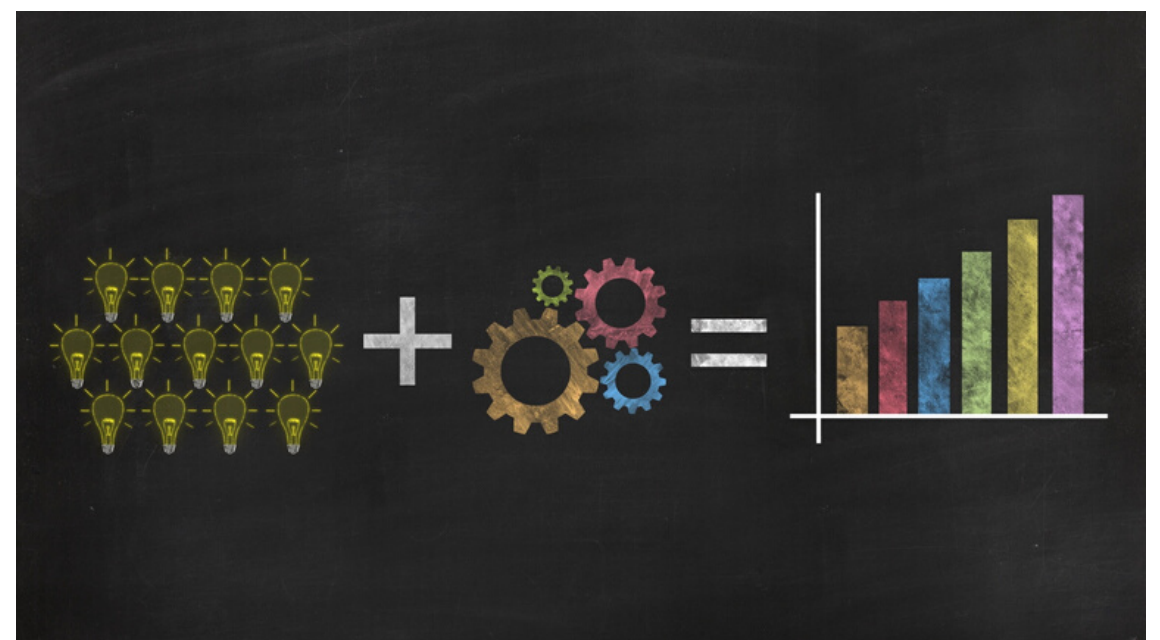
Stepping back to explore your practices or processes may feel counterintuitive now, especially if your workforce is challenged to merely meet customer needs.

However, this pause serves two primary purposes. One, it means stepping back to make your team more efficient or effective in the long run. And "long run" right now might even mean the next 2-3 months. An investment now can yield productivity gains or gains in customer satisfaction. This matters particularly as anxious employees and frazzled customers will remember this experience. Forever.

Two, it focuses the team on resilience and continuous improvement. Your role is to help facilitate the process of auditing and improving processes, not doing all the work associated with the experience.

Engage your team in the identification of key processes and practices. You can identify areas of improvement by looking at the most significant pain points for your team or your customers. Is it technology? Communication? Work flow? Collaboration?

Do an inventory. Measure. Prioritize.



Consider the following as a jump start to your own:

- work processes
- technology needs
- safety and security practices
- work at home expectations, processes and/or practices
- communication guidelines or standards:
 - with you
 - across team
 - with customers
 - across organization
- virtual meeting guidelines
- one-on-ones with employees
- team meetings
- problem solving process
- decision making guidelines, authority, practices
- customer processes
- complaint resolution practices and/or processes

Summary & Tips



1. Revisit the fundamentals of management:

- Plan
- Organize
- Lead
- Control

Where are you spending your time? Where could you be spending your time that would have a positive impact on your team? Your organization? Your customers?

Typically we focus on the areas that give us energy (this is especially true in times of anxiety or overwhelm when we want a quick win), rather than what will provide the biggest return. Do a time audit. Be very mindful of where you are spending your time. And pivot.

2. Engage your team in continuous improvement efforts.

You are the facilitator, not the doer. Check out the list on page 16, and use this as a discussion guide for your team. Involve them in creating the structure that will create certainty. Which means focus and action.

This is another chance for growth and development of your team. Encourage ownership and engagement. These are areas I consistently hear managers saying they want more of....and then they inadvertently squash ownership by doing things themselves ("*It's easier!*" or "*It's faster!*" they say! only short term I say! Besides do you want to help them grow? On purpose? Geesh.).

Delegate with intention and support. Delegation does not mean abdicating accountability, rather partnering with your employee on the required results. Have a thoughtful discussion to set your employee up to be successful. Be available. Do not fall into the trap of reverse delegation (i.e., taking it back!). Use each delegated task or responsibility as an opportunity for learning.

LEADERSHIP. NOT CANCELLED. SUMMARY

01: Practice Compassion

Research suggests that we have more than 400 emotional experiences every single day. I would bet in today's environment, that number is significantly higher. Emotions have a profound effect on us, and often times we don't even realize it. You are called on as a leader to pay attention to emotions. Yours and others. And take comfort that if you do, you will be trusted more, gain more credibility as a leader, and your employees will perform at a higher level.

Manage your emotional energy. Ask how your employees are doing. Listen. Empathize. Offer compassion.

02: Build Competencies

When you signed up for leadership, you signed up to be a learner. Perhaps this wasn't specifically identified in your position description, but it is definitely implied (*surprise!* other duties as assigned).

At some point, you will tell the tales of the COVID-19 pandemic. There will be stories of challenge, heartache and pain. Know too, that there will be learning and growth. That we can come "out" of this experience stronger, more capable and wiser. Decide on purpose what you will do to grow.

Be transparent. Be vulnerable. Learn and repeat.

03: Adopt New Practices

Neuroscience has identified that when we lack certainty, our "threat" response can be triggered (fight or flight). We have bundles of uncertainty right now, so as leaders we need to create a semblance of order for the work that needs to be accomplished. Providing structure for your team will calm anxiety, and also help them to be more efficient and effective.

Engage your team in the building process. Don't be the hero rescuing everyone, be the coach empowering the team.

LEADERSHIP.
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CALL TO ACTION

One way I can practice compassion:

One competency I will build in myself:

One competency I will build in my team:

Two processes or practices I'd like to engage my team to improve are:



Leadership has its challenges.
Learning to lead shouldn't be one of them.

I hope you found this ebook helpful. If it prompted at least one action you can take to lead more confidently and compassionately during this horrible pandemic, I've accomplished my goal.

I founded Intentionaleaders to inspire purpose-driven and energized leadership that's enjoyable and fun. With over 25 years of experience, I know the successes and challenges that leaders face and I know the pitfalls and practices that lead to success. I also know that “knowing” leadership practices and consistently “doing” leadership practices differentiates leaders at all levels. Please join me as I provide the roadmap, tools and resources that will help you or your organization put leadership practices into daily action!

Cyndi

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