



Leadership through Uncertainty

10 Enduring lessons for turbulent time

Uncertain times can severely test (and reveal) the quality of an organization's leadership. It is during these times that great leaders act - and act decisively. Through their actions, they set an example for everyone in the organization and stand as the difference between thriving in a crisis or suffering irreparable damage. Indeed, turbulent environments often increase the distance between winners and losers in competitive markets. Those that outpace the competition are often defined by the effectiveness of their leadership team.

So how do effective leaders deal with uncertainty? Here are 10 enduring lessons for organizations to consider.

1. COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE (AND THEN COMMUNICATE MORE)



Uncertainty produces anxiety throughout the workforce and among customers, suppliers and investors. Silence will be interpreted as (very) bad news. It is essential to communicate (and reinforce) a clear perspective on what is happening and what it means for the organization.

2. HELP OTHERS LEAD



One person alone cannot lead in turbulent times. The organization needs many leaders in times of such rapid, constant and unpredictable change. The best leaders step up at this time and help others lead - they do not retreat behind an understandable level of stress and information overload. Leaders who enable and create other leaders are catalysts for widespread change across



leadership teams and boards.

3. PLAN FOR THE LONG AND SHORT TERM



Great leaders have the ability to devote the appropriate resources to the immediate needs of the organization while maintaining a focus on long-term strategic goals. These leaders don't hesitate to make the hard choices to address short-term priorities; they also demonstrate the courage to preserve the [investments](#) that are essential to the long-term health of the organization. In the face of uncertainty, weak leaders are guided primarily by concerns over the "optics" of their decisions; strong leaders are guided by a clear view of the sacrifices required to preserve strategic direction.

4. FOCUS ON CORE VALUES



An organization's mission, culture and values are put to the test in turbulent times. Great leaders communicate and amplify the organization's mission to reassure and galvanize those around them. They identify "culture champions" to set a visible example by reinforcing the culture and values that will guide the organization through difficult periods. They consistently convey (in word and deed) that the organization's enduring values are the best tool for navigating short-term challenges.

5. ENGAGE EARLY, WITH PURPOSE AND HUMILITY





Even when under pressure, great leaders engage purposefully with those around them to marshal the energy of the broader workforce. They create a sense of togetherness by having the humility to listen to a wide range of opinions - not just those from their leadership team - and focus on asking questions rather than attempting to serve as the universal source of answers.

6. LOOK OUTWARD



A natural reaction to a sudden shock is to withdraw inward. The best leaders actively resist this instinct. They look outward to employees, suppliers, customers, boards and [investors](#), gathering the insight required to enable better decision making. This should be a two-way channel at all levels, with insights flowing to and from all key stakeholders.

7. CREATE ORDER FROM CHAOS



In the early days of a crisis, great leaders cut through the clutter of conflicting data and opinions, identifying the areas that need attention and allocating resources accordingly. They quickly develop and communicate a point of view on the best path forward, providing a welcome sense of direction to an organization that might otherwise be paralyzed by indecision.

8. KNOW WHEN TO PIVOT





Great leaders are unsentimental about the strategies and tactics that have led to their success. They know the moment when abandoning what has always worked is less risky than sticking with the playbook. This ability to choose the right time to change tack instils confidence in the organization and injects the energy needed to drive change.

9. EXUDE REALISTIC OPTIMISM



Great leaders must honestly [accept](#) the gravity of challenging situations. They communicate this openly and honestly and are humble enough to admit they don't have all the answers. Doing so provides them with credibility to also share an optimistic, authentic [vision](#) that is both reassuring and realistic.

10. DEMONSTRATE GRIT



Grit is the mental toughness, perseverance and unwavering focus with which great leaders approach challenges. This means seeing tasks through to completion, maintaining the highest performance standards and exuding calm and optimism. In serving as a role model of these qualities, the best leaders lift the collective resilience and tenacity of the entire organization