



New Leadership Skills for Our New World

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A New Leadership Approach for Our New World

Three Key Leadership Insights of Top Leaders

There was urgency in the cryptic voice message from the bright young CEO of a powerhouse Canadian company. When we finally got a chance to speak, the worries began to tumble out like sagebrush rolling across the Nevada desert - COVID-19 had done its damage.

- His business, like so many others in the midst of the economic fallout, had decreased to a trickle.
- Seventy-five percent of his staff had been furloughed
- The remaining few employees were feeling heavy with the added work responsibilities and the worry of becoming infected as they came to the office daily.

He was confident that on the other side of the pandemic, all his employees would have jobs and be busier than ever before. What he was most anxious about, however, was whether they would actually survive so they could return to work – and he literally was talking about physical - and more importantly - mental survival.

If you are a leader, you might feel some of the same concerns he had. Your company, if it is like most, has more than one in four employees navigating substance abuse in their homes¹ – at least that was the statistic before COVID-19. The number has now

dramatically increased,² right along with the concern of increased employee suicide,³ which is hailed as the new workplace safety crisis.⁴ Additionally, for many employees stuck at home increased domestic abuse further heaps pain on top of misery.⁵ Incidentally, domestic abuse has reached its own pandemic proportions worldwide.

As a caring leader, you may be grateful to discover three tips from successful leaders here, as you think of your employees' faces passing through your mind. You might see their tortured eyes, and feel their discouraged hearts and worry over their ever-decreasing mental health during this pandemic.⁶ You might find yourself asking: *What is a leader to do? Where do I even begin?* Good leaders everywhere are facing a collision of crises - one on top of the other - that seem to exceed all previous life experiences. If you feel overwhelmed, you are in good company.



Resilience in the Crucible of Crisis

Even though the negative news pounds you and the death toll cloaks the globe in a cold pallor, there is cause for hope. It is found in the power of the human heart, and of resilient leaders everywhere who let this challenge grow their leadership muscles and positive influence. There are emerging quiet miracles that reflect this resilience, as we sit at the very crossroads of the crisis.

For example, in Wuhan, China a 645,000 square-foot hospital equipped with 1,000 beds, several isolation wards, and 30 intensive care units was operational in ten days thanks to 7,500 laborers who worked around the clock.⁷ In one example from Korea, 200,000 citizens gained almost immediate access to rapid COVID testing that meant wiser care and swifter quarantine of those affected.⁸ Smart phones were used to tag movements of infected individuals and help others remain safe, surely saving thousands of lives.

These are remarkable examples of what can happen through resilient leaders wisely redirecting the energy of their people. It is hard to imagine their employees drinking themselves into oblivion, abusing family members, or contemplating suicide when they are part of making such meaningful contributions at such a crucial time.



Three Things Resilient Leaders Teach Us About Leadership of the Future

Let's look at what we can learn from today's resilient leaders as we think about the kind of new leadership that will be required in a post-COVID world. Here are three key leadership insights pooled from some of our top leaders in the thirty-two countries where we work.

1. **Grow your people – and your people will grow the business.**

In a crisis, the hardest things to change are often the softest things. Task-driven leaders, accustomed to focusing on performance, will fail in the post-pandemic economy if they fail to attend to creating authentic relationships. This is in part because home-based work is here to stay, and you can no longer afford to avoid taking a personal interest in your employees, many of whom are battling the challenges we've identified here.

Leaders will need structure and guidance to help them shift from task-oriented "telling" to coach-like asking and genuine listening. They will definitely need help switching their mindset so their primary role as a leader becomes focused on growing people and future leaders (rather than just getting the job done). If leaders focus on growing their people as their first priority, their people will make growing the business *their* first priority.



2. Vulnerability is the new confidence.

Leaders in the new economy will be masters of multiplication: specifically, they will multiply confidence with vulnerability so they can inspire authentic relationships that lead to dramatic increases in innovation and collaboration. Confident Vulnerability™ is described as, *“the ability to stand in your strengths with courage and embrace your weakness without fear.”* It is the equivalent of “trust on steroids” and acts like a super-powered super-glue that bonds people together. It makes people true multipliers of one another, rather than subtractors or dividers. The synergy produced through Confident Vulnerability™ allows for exponentially accelerated innovation and collaboration – the kind that will be absolutely crucial in the days ahead.

This skill, by the way, is not for the faint-of-heart leader. It requires making peace with your mistakes, failures, and weaknesses, and releasing the shame created by judgment. It also means having crystal clarity about your strengths – not just how they contribute, but the conditions under which they flourish. You might think of these conditions as your highly personalized needs, which if not met, become frustration triggers. They flip your strengths into weaknesses and accelerate your mistakes and failures.

Learning Confident Vulnerability™ exponentially reduces the time a leader spends feeling depleted – and thus increases the amount of time and energy needed to make the ground-breaking contributions so important in the future.

3. **STOP** trying to create employee engagement – and instead, ignite Work Joy.

Academic researcher, Brad Shuck, describes a frustrating, but pervasive mindset of today’s employees that must be disrupted: *“Employees choose whether or not to engage themselves in relation to the resources they get from their organization.”*⁹ This mindset has created a dysfunctional pattern in many companies today, as leaders scramble to figure out how to emotionally entice workers to voluntarily commit their hearts and minds to their work. The problem is that most leaders are using a common, but outmoded method that will surely fail in the new world.

The antiquated approach is based on an idea you might call transactionalism. In other words, *“I’ll give you what you want so you will give me what I want.”* The problem with this mindset, also referred to as co-dependence, is that it lacks the sufficient power needed to fully ignite the hearts and minds of your employees who are trying to survive one crisis after the other.

The reality is that you cannot bribe, transact, or force true Work Joy, which is the employee-chosen (not leader-driven) equivalent of engagement. It produces the identical outcomes of high employee engagement: things like *decreased* absenteeism, turnover, shrinkage, safety incidents, and quality defects; along with *increased* customer ratings, productivity, and profitability to name a few.¹⁰ The difference is that Work Joy is not based only on an employee’s circumstances or what a leader

A New Leadership Approach for Our New World

gives him/her. It is a proactive choice that is made by employees who are self-leaders, who have learned to be masters of their emotion rather than servants of it.

Leaders cannot empower Work Joy in their employees if they do not understand the principles that lead to it. Nor can they fan its flames if they are unsure of how to partner with their workers to develop this important skill. Guidance and attention will be needed to shift the mindset and skillset of leaders to achieve the only sustainable engagement solution in the new world economy operated largely by home-based workers.



A New Business Ecosystem

Speaking of fanning flames, when the 1988 forest fire at Yellowstone National Park burned over 3,200 square kilometers, it seemed on the surface as though a beloved national treasure had died.¹¹ Hundreds of thousands of people mourned what seemed to be an irreplaceable loss. What they did not realize, however, is that the fire created the exact optimal conditions needed for Yellowstone to be enhanced and preserved for years to come.

The lodgepole pines that then made up eighty percent of the park's forest would only release their seeds when extremely high temperatures melted the resin that sealed them. The fire thus became a seed-spreading catalyst that has created a more beautiful park than ever existed before. This offers a metaphor to help us reframe what is happening today.

It feels at times like there are just too many losses to process right now. There is so much pain. What seemed like treasures to us have gone up in smoke, and a somewhat bleak landscape meets our view.

Yet, our children's children will be talking about the global pandemic of 2020, but not mourning the losses we feel right now. Instead, they will be the beneficiaries of the new seeds that are being spread and bringing new life because of the extreme "heat" of this experience. Those seeds are creating a new kind of leadership and business ecosystem where people and performance are held with equal value, where Work Joy is a choice that most individuals know how to make, and Confident Vulnerability™ is the way leaders lead and followers follow. We can co-create that new ecosystem together if we honor the leadership principles that lead to it. You can bet that our children's children are depending on us to do just that.

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People Acuity offers leading-edge leadership development services in thirty-two countries across the globe. Their mission is to lift business performance by empowering leaders to win the hearts and minds of their people through self-driven Work Joy and proactive accountability. They provide measurable behavior change and a multi-modality learning approach, including virtual, live, and online learning supported by coaching.

This report has been written by **DeAnna Murphy** – the founder and CEO of **People Acuity** and principal author of *Shift Up! Strengths Strategies for Optimal Living and Choose to See You* – in collaboration with co-thought leaders, *Lisa Gregory* and *Steve Jeffs*. It includes information about Interdependent Leadership, which starts with helping leaders lead themselves more effectively. DeAnna is a Top 100 Global Coaching Leader who has provided keynotes and leadership development experiences across the globe.

¹ <https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/workplace/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/world/europe/russia-coronavirus-alcoholism.html>

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/01/09/more-americans-are-killing-themselves-work/>

⁴ <https://www.workforce.com/news/employee-suicide-is-the-next-big-workplace-safety-crisis>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html>

⁶ <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/04/rising-mental-health-concerns-in-the-coronavirus-era/>

⁷ <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-china-managed-build-entirely-new-hospital-in-10-days-2020-2?r=US&IR=T>

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/11/mass-testing-alerts-and-big-fines-the-strategies-used-in-asia-to-slow-coronavirus>

⁹ See here academic research of [Brad Shuck](#).

¹⁰ See Gallup's article on the positive outcomes of [employee engagement](#).

¹¹ [The Value of Fires to Yellowstone National Park](#).

