

Leading in Times of Significant Change and Uncertainty:

Straight Talk from Senior Leaders



Joe Raia



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— Second Edition —

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Second Edition

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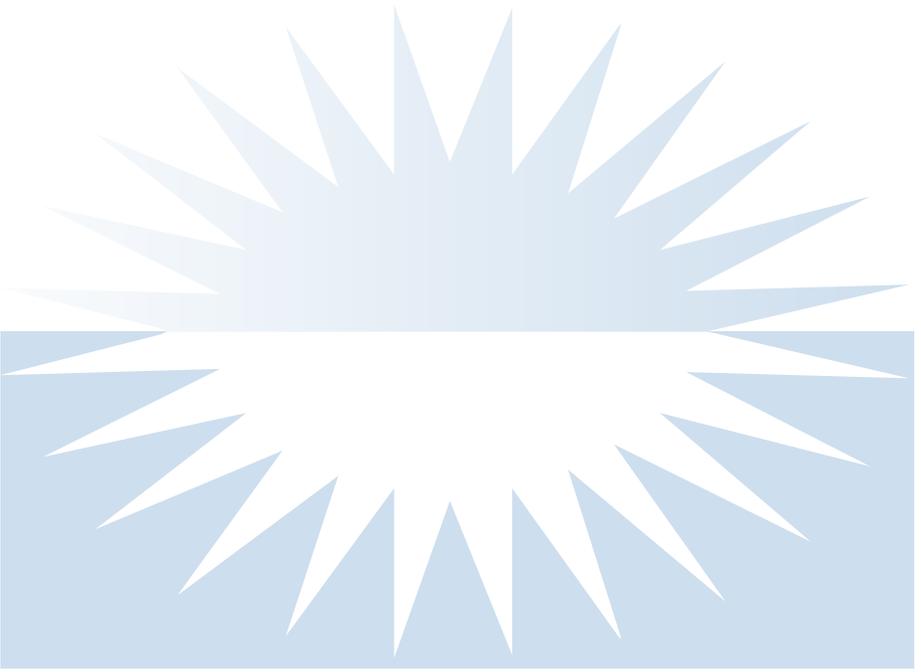
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Forward: A Note About the Second Edition

The survey of senior leaders that led to the publishing of the first edition of this handbook was conducted in the first quarter of 2009, in the midst of the Great Recession. That period of time, from 2007–2009, brought us multiple crises in the jobs, housing, and financial markets. Eleven years later, in the second quarter of 2020, we are in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the rise of a global focus on racial and social injustice. In the past six months alone, we have experienced massive shutdowns across the country, quarantines, an unprecedented, rapid rise of remote work policies, record unemployment levels, social unrest, and near-complete suspension of multiple industries and sectors.

Clients and colleagues have urged me to share this work in this new light as they find that the leadership insights and recommendations first gleaned during the 2007–2009 times of significant change and uncertainty to be exceptionally relevant to our current situations. Looking back at the advice provided by the senior leaders in 2009 and listening to leaders and team members over these past few months, I thank my colleagues and clients for pushing me to reintroduce this work during these changing times.

The ten key themes and over 30 recommendations (augmented by a few more) for leading in times of significant change and uncertainty from the first edition, along with the original quotes from senior leaders, are all included in this updated handbook. The use of the three overarching categories, *Leading Yourself*, *Leading the People*, and *Leading the Business*, is a new feature that evolved from the feedback and comments received in the early rounds of leadership development workshops based on this work.

As you read through the book, I urge you to reflect on your experiences and observations regarding your own situation, your leadership practices, and your impact on your team members and colleagues. Consider which themes, recommendations, and quotes are most relevant in today's environment. Think about which you

have put into practice and how you can intentionally continue to do so. Identify a few recommendations that would be beneficial to put into action more often and/or more effectively.

Before ending with the quote that has been described as the “guiding light” for this work, I’d like to make a request and an offer.

First, the request: As you are reading this handbook, and particularly as you are doing the reflection and action planning work suggested above, please reach out to me to share any key reactions. What did you find most relevant and useful? What type of actions are you taking? Perhaps, most importantly, what additional recommendations would you like to share regarding leading in times of significant change and uncertainty?

Second, the offer: If you’d like to discuss any of the content that’s included in this work, or bounce around any ideas about how you can enhance your effectiveness as a leader in times of significant change, just send me a note or give a call. We all grow through open exchange and dialogue. Your input is welcomed and greatly appreciated.

The very first quote included in the first edition continues to be a guiding light to this work:

Good leadership practices are always important. They are just SO MUCH MORE CRUCIAL when times are difficult, when there’s so much change going on . . .”

I wish you the very best in your leadership journey!

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Introduction: Where This Advice Comes From

One hundred senior leaders. . . . Two simple questions:

- What expectations do you have of front-line and mid-level leaders in terms of leading in times of significant change and uncertainty?
- What guidance, advice and recommendations do you have for front-line and mid-level leaders in terms of leading in times of significant change and uncertainty?

The senior leaders answering these two questions represent a wide variety of organizations from the public, private, higher education and non-profit sectors. Their responses provide practical, hands-on, and straightforward guidance to help you be a more effective leader in all times—and particularly in times of significant change and uncertainty.

The ten key themes and accompanying recommendations included in this book come straight from the senior executives. You'll read their words, their perspectives, their recommendations. Some are more obvious. Others are more subtle. All are valuable.

Pay particular attention to the many quotes you'll see in italics—these are the actual words of senior leaders. Think about which actions you're already taking. Identify the recommendations you haven't applied yet. Put a plan together.

All the best as you become a more effective leader in times of significant change and uncertainty.

The Three Overarching Categories

In the Forward of this 2020 edition, I noted how, over time, we began to realize how the themes fell into three broader categories of leadership focus and behavior. These interrelated three “Overarching Categories” are noted in the graphic below: “Leading Yourself,” “Leading the People,” and “Leading the Business.”



LEADING YOURSELF: This first category reinforces the critical nature of what many people refer to as “self-leadership.” The category is perhaps best defined by the phrase, “Before you lead other people, make sure you are leading yourself.” Nearly a dozen specific recommendations provide guidance on how to more effectively lead yourself as a foundation for being a more effective leader in times of significant change.

LEADING THE PEOPLE: The focus on leading people is at the core of ongoing, everyday leadership—and becomes even more critical in times of change and uncertainty. Four key themes with another 17 associated recommendations provide leaders with significant perspective on truly honoring, serving, and leading your most important resources—the people in the organization.

LEADING THE BUSINESS: Senior leaders were also very clear about the need for leaders to continue to focus on achieving business results. Within that focus, though, they emphasized how critical it is for leaders to focus on more creative and innovative ways to achieve those results—particularly when the changing environment places so many demands on people and organizations.

Leading Yourself



KEY THEMES

- **Embrace the Increased Importance of Your Leadership Role**
- **Understand the Changing Environment**
- **Manage Yourself and Your Demeanor**

Embrace the Increased Importance of Your Leadership Role

“Good leadership practices are always important. They are just SO MUCH MORE CRUCIAL when times are difficult, when there’s so much change going on. In good times, effective leadership practices can be seen as less relevant. In difficult times, they are CRITICAL TO SURVIVAL . . .”

Read the quote again. You can choose to view it as a warning: “If I don’t show some great leadership, we might fail . . .” Or . . . you can choose to interpret it as an inspiration, as an opportunity: “I have an opportunity to have a tremendous impact on other people and the organization.” Choose the second approach and think about how you can have a lasting positive impact on your people and your entire organization.

The Recommendations

Acknowledge—and Embrace—the Need for More Effective Leadership in Times of Change

Put More Conscious Effort and Energy on Leadership Practices and Behaviors

- **Acknowledge—and Embrace—the Need for More Effective Leadership in Times of Change**

“Leadership skills are necessary for good leaders in all circumstances. They are even more critical in these times of change and uncertainty.”

Senior leaders were clear in their counsel. Times of significant change and uncertainty do not call for entirely new sets of leadership practices. It’s a matter of degree.

“There’s an added urgency now . . .that presents more of a reason for leaders to stand up and embrace the situation.”

Significant change and uncertainty increases your staff members’ thirst for and openness to effective leadership. They are looking to their immediate supervisors and managers to help them understand the situation, to help them be more successful. Most will quickly and openly accept your leadership assuming it is done with the right intent and in an appropriate manner. Prepare yourself to accept this challenge, this invitation, this opportunity.

- **Put More Conscious Effort and Energy into Your Leadership Practices and Behaviors**

“When times get tight, it shines a spotlight on our leadership practices. . . . You have to do more of what you’ve already been doing . . . and really concentrate on some of the things you haven’t done in the past. You need to make a more concerted effort . . .”

What might have been a “nice-to-do” in times of stability becomes a “need-to-do” in times of change. What required a “little bit” of attention now requires “a lot” of attention. What might have been done once a month may need to be practiced every week or even every day. “Lead early . . . lead often . . .” Leadership practices that might be implemented without much forethought require more conscious energy and effort.

“We need to be doing these things all of the time. In times of change—we need to be more vigilant, more focused with our leadership practice.”

Understand the Changing Environment

“Developing a thorough understanding of existing conditions is the foundation to effective leadership. It’s difficult to get people to follow if you don’t understand or believe in the change or the direction—that’s a fundamental principle . . .”

Before you can educate your staff members, you need to educate yourself about the changes going on and the rationale behind them. Gain a clear understanding about what’s going on and be prepared to use that understanding to help get employees aligned.

The Recommendations

Educate Yourself About the Change

Align Yourself With the Organization

Get a Handle on the Big Picture

• Educate Yourself About the Change

“Understand the fundamentals of the business. . . . Understand the relevant issues and situations. . . . Keep informed—ask questions . . . become fluent in whatever change is occurring . . . understand the reasons for the changes . . . know your stuff—understand what’s going on and how it impacts the company . . .”

Developing a comprehensive understanding of the change and the rationale behind it is crucial to your leadership credibility and effectiveness. Read everything you can. Talk with your managers and with people inside and outside your unit. Ask questions to get a better understanding of what’s going on. This understanding is a critical prerequisite to you being able to communicate with your employees about the changing environment.

• Align Yourself With the Organization

“Embrace the goals of the organization. . . . Support the leadership of your business unit. . . . If you have concerns, discuss them with your senior leader and make sure you resolve your concerns. . . . Maintain a united front as a leadership team. . . . Challenge decisions behind closed doors and support decisions publicly . . .”

Staff members will look to their leaders for direct and indirect signals about whether they are “on board” or not. Alignment is not blind loyalty. Rather, it is a conscious process of gaining a clear understanding of the rationale behind decisions. Use that understanding to build a sense of support and commitment to the change and direction. Actively demonstrate that commitment and alignment in your words and actions.

“Supervisors need to know the overall strategy. If you have questions, go up the organization for answers and explanation.”

• Get a Handle on the Big Picture

“Stay abreast of relevant trends, customer needs and market shifts. . . . Understand the organizations strategic goals and how your group fits in. . . . Keep the big picture in mind while dealing with the present. . . . Keep the long term vision in front of you and your people. . . . Link the environmental issues to company issues . . .”

It’s tempting to get caught up in the day-to-day issues at the expense of making the link to the longer term strategic view. Part of understanding and aligning with the change is developing a clearer understanding of the broader situational factors. Educate yourself on these key issues as you prepare to share that insight with your team.

“Develop a deep knowledge of the business you are in—not just your area of specialty.”

Manage Yourself and Your Demeanor

“Our employees take us—the work, the organization—home with them every night. They take the moods and the attitudes they see and they talk about it at home. It’s crucial that our leaders stay calm and positive in these times. They have a huge impact on how our employees see things . . .”

Your impact on the mood, morale and productivity of your staff is magnified in times of change and uncertainty. Employees look to their leaders for direct and indirect signals. Be very clear about how you manage yourself and your demeanor—as it has a tremendous impact on your staff.

The Recommendations

Lead by Example—Be a Role Model

Stay Calm, Don’t Overreact

Be Positive

Demonstrate a Sincere Care and Concern

Take Care of Yourself

• **Lead by Example—Be a Role Model**

“Lead by personal example—be to work early, help out in other areas, don’t be ‘above’ any task. . . . Show passion for what you are doing. . . . Work hard, do more than what is expected. . . . Be the model of what is expected. . . . Be honest. . . . Be humble. . . . Above all, act with integrity and honor . . .”

What you say is important. What you do is even more important. People look at your actions and behaviors and draw conclusions about what’s acceptable and what’s not. Know that you set the tone; make sure it’s an appropriate one.

• Stay Calm, Don't Overreact

“Remain positive, calm and reassuring as many of your direct reports may feel panic and anxiety. . . . It's okay to feel uncomfortable—but don't get paralyzed by fear and anxiety. . . . Don't overreact to current circumstances. . . . Bad news gets recycled a lot—don't panic and don't become part of a self-defeating cycle. . . . serve as a 'non-anxious' presence . . .”

How you react to significant change and uncertainty sends a strong signal out to your staff. If people see you panic, they are more likely to panic. If they see you taking things in stride, thinking things over carefully, and acting calmly, they are more likely to do the same. They look to you for reassurance—help them receive it.

“Be a calming influence. How you receive and react to bad news is a true mark of your leadership . . .”

• Be Positive

“Lead with the most positive front. . . . Personally maintain a positive attitude. . . . Encourage others to maintain a positive attitude. . . . Show up in a good mood and share that with people. . . . Exhibit confidence. . . . Be credibly optimistic. . . . Look for positive outcomes . . .”

This advice is not asking you to be unduly and insincerely happy. It is reminding you of the power you have to help shape the mood and morale of your group. Take a more positive approach and see the impact it can have.

“Smile every once in a while. We still need to have some level of levity. If the tension is too thick, people become afraid to approach you. . .

• Demonstrate a Clear Care and Concern

“People can be more stressed during these times be more sensitive to people’s emotions. . . . Demonstrate your concern. . . . Be patient and supportive with your staff. . . . Treat everyone with respect and dignity. . . . Be there for your employees—don’t disappear. . . . Be visible, be approachable, be accessible . . .”

Times of change and uncertainty bring out a wide variety of emotions and reactions. This is a time that allows and obligates you to demonstrate more care and concern for your staff. Talk with people—individually and collectively. Ask questions and listen to what people are saying.

• Take Care of Yourself

“Take care of yourself—you’re of little value to your people if you’re showing signs of stress and dissatisfaction. . . . Manage yourself. . . . deal with your own fears and uncertainties. . . . talk to your manager and seek advice. . . . Maintain some balance in your work and non-work life. . . . Take care of yourself—take a walk, get extra sleep, exercise . . .”

You’re not expected to be a super-hero. To be most effective with your people, you need to be taking care of yourself. Identify your own questions and concerns and talk about them with your manager. Help yourself be the role model you need to be.

“Check your own ‘pulse’ every once in a while. . . . as your staff will feed off your enthusiasm or your irritation at the changes in front of them . . .”

“Keep people positive—about the work, about new projects, about new customers. . . . look at things longer-term and more positively . . .”

“Acknowledge that your people may be in a place of greater stress. Simply acknowledging that can have a tremendous impact. It can give people an immediate sense of your leadership . . .”

“Employees tend to be more open today. Many will have stronger emotional needs for reassurance and stability. They are more open to conversation. Make sure you are approaching them and that you are accessible to them . . .”

Leading the People



KEY THEMES

- **Help People Get Focused**
- **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate**
- **Engage Staff Members**
- **Refine Your Ongoing Performance Management Techniques**

Help People Get Focused

“It’s absolutely crucial that everyone is working on the same page. Oftentimes, people can go off in their own direction. In times of change—we need everyone focusing on the same mission, strategy, and goals . . .”

It’s easy for people to get distracted in times of significant change. Your role as a leader is to help people stay focused on what’s most important. You can and should play an active role in refocusing their energy and effort on achieving the results that are needed to move the organization forward.

The Recommendations

Reinforce the Core Mission and Vision

Reassess and Confirm Priorities

Focus on the Customer

- **Reinforce the Core Mission and Vision**

“Be clear about the central purpose and mission. . . . Maintain focus on the company’s core business lines. . . . Be loyal to the mission and core values. . . . Get back to the basics—refocus the mission. . . . Understand the mission and strategic plan and then commit yourself and your staff to them . . .”

More than ever, staff members need to understand the bigger picture and how they fit into that picture. Constantly and consistently discuss the organization’s purpose, mission, and vision. Make direct links to your group’s contribution. Double your efforts to keep people focused on meeting ongoing deliverables.

“Help your staff understand the ‘mini-vision’—how they fit into the larger picture . . .”

• Reassess and Confirm Priorities

“Don’t become distracted—the operation and the associated challenges have not gone away. . . . Continue to focus on running the business. . . . Focus on the vital few and critical priorities. . . . Revisit the operating plan and reevaluate what the priorities are. . . . Focus on things you and your staff have control over . . .”

The distractions of major change and uncertainty can dilute the focus. It’s essential to keep people focused on what’s most important. Make sure those highest priorities are still valid. Where necessary, change the focus to ensure that effort are spent on achieving the most critical results. If priorities do change, make sure everyone is informed about the adjustments and the rationale behind them.

“Employees want something or someone to follow—help them understand the big picture. Keep them grounded on the needs of the customer and the organizational goals . . .”

• Focus on the Customer

“Maintain the focus on our customers. . . . Listen to what your clients need and find value by adding solutions to make their lives easier. . . . Focus on those things that are critical to the populations we serve. . . . Spend more time than usual with your customers. . . . Do everything to hold onto existing customers. . . . Think about what our customers need and want—not what we want . . .”

Whatever business you’re in, your customers will guide your success. Reemphasize the need to connect with the customers. Help staff members understand how they impact the customers. Identify and focus on activities that will deliver value to the customers.

“Get past the distractions and figure out what you and your people have control over. Get back to basic blocking and tackling activities that are crucial to our operations. Focus on the central mission . . .”

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

“As the business evolves during these changing times, a premium will be placed on the leaders’ communication with their employees. It is critical that employees have easy access to the leaders and that the leaders are prepared to answer questions. . . .”

In times of significant change, employees have more questions, more concerns. The situation is more complex, the environment more unsettling. Your responsibilities as a communicator are crucial to the success of your organization.

The Recommendations

Communicate Early, Communicate Often

Be Honest and Transparent

Share As Much Information As You Can

Ask, Listen, and Respond

Combat the Rumor Mill

Communicate Upward to Your Managers

- **Communicate Early, Communicate Often**

“Remain close to your personnel. . . . Conduct weekly, short update meetings. . . . Meet daily with them. . . . Communicate regularly—even when we lack solid information. . . . Have constant and regular contact with staff . . . over-communicate . . .”

This is an extension of the counsel provided earlier about being available, accessible, and visible. Take the initiative to create opportunities to interact with your staff on a very regular basis. Meet with individuals and groups in formal and informal settings. Schedule more frequent regular meetings and find the natural opportunities to increase the communication flow.

• Be Honest and Transparent

“Be transparent—share what you know unless it is confidential. . . . Communicate candidly, confidently, and often with employees. . . . Be open and honest with team members—do not sugar coat. . . . Share all news, good or bad, inclusively and quickly . . .”

Employees are looking to their immediate leaders to give them the straight story, to make sense of things that are happening. They want and need to feel that they can trust in their leaders and believe what they hear from them. Make sure you are open, honest, and candid in your communications.

“The need for open, candid communications—upward, downward, and laterally—is crucial in times of change.”

• Share As Much Information As You Can

“Clearly articulate the reasons for the changes. . . . Be the primary conveyors of information that would help ease staff members’ anxieties. . . . Communicate continually on the state of the business. . . . Continue to brief employees, even if it just to say that we still need clarification on issue xyz. . . . Clearly communicate decisions . . .”

Employees are thirsting for more and more information. Lacking clear information, chances are likely that employees will fill in the gaps with their own interpretations and speculations. Follow the guidelines of honesty and transparency and provide as much information in ways that your people are most likely to understand.

“The old adage of “Information is Power” is NOT what we’re looking for! Give everyone the information they need and want so they can understand what’s going on and so they can do the work they’re capable of doing. . . .”

• Ask, Listen, and Respond

“Ask questions . . . ask for feedback on how things are going . . . listen to what’s being said—and ‘unsaid’ . . . listen as much or more than you talk . . . do a ‘pulse check’ to see how they’re doing. . . . Acknowledge the change, listen to concerns, and keep communications open . . .”

Effective communication needs to be two-way. Leaders need to open the door to employee input and insight—and keep that door open. Ask questions, truly listen to the responses, pay attention to the body language and non-verbal signals, acknowledge the reactions, and address questions and concerns as best as you can. Listen to understand the other person and respond with empathy.

“Fear of the unknown generates more anxiety than anything else. . . . Sharing information is crucial. Give people what they need to form opinions and to make decisions—based on facts, data and reality . . .”

• Combat the Rumor Mill

“Don’t promote or encourage rumors—seek and share clear information. . . . Control rumors with real information; people appreciate knowing what there is to know and being trusted with that information. . . . Always challenge rumors and bad information . . .”

Periods of significant change and uncertainty can be a breeding ground for rumors and innuendo. In turn, the rumors can sap morale and distract people from focusing on what’s most important. The best way to combat unproductive rumors is to address them right away by sharing as much information as possible.

“Never, never lie to staff. If you don’t know, say you don’t know. If you do know but cannot say, tell staff that. If you know and can share, be forth right and share the information with all.”

• Communicate Upward to Your Managers

“Communicate up to your leadership as well as down. . . . Provide quality feedback to senior management. . . . Full and open upward communication with senior leaders to assure they have a candid perspective on how the organization is doing. . . . Keep the company informed of changes in customer needs that may present challenges or opportunities . . . ”

You play a crucial role as conduit of information up and down the organization. Your senior leaders need real information, input and perspective that you get from your staff members. That insight is critical for effective decision making. You are a key player in conveying that information accurately, honestly, and frequently.

“Encourage your staff members to ask questions about what doesn’t make sense to them. If you’re not there to help, they’ll fill in the blanks themselves. Follow up on questions and issues you can’t immediately address. Don’t let them linger . . . ”

“Make sure you provide people with the facts. Communicate the information clearly so people don’t have to make things up. Nip misinformation and misperceptions up front . . . ”

Engage Staff Members

“Get out of the office. Actively engage with employees about their work, their expectations of the organization, and their suggestions for improving the day-to-day operations . . .”

Study after study confirms the positive impact engaged employees have on organizational effectiveness. In times of change and uncertainty, the link between employee and organization can be severely tested. As a leader, you need to be the main point of contact with your employees. Get them engaged and involved as much as possible.

The Recommendations

Involve and Include All Staff Members

Interact With Employees Individually and Collectively

Solicit Input From Staff Members

- **Involve and Include All Staff Members**

“Practice inclusion—make sure all voices have an opportunity to be heard. . . . Involvement is critical; practice inclusion whenever possible. . . . Enlist diverse opinions. . . . Be inclusive in decision making . . .”

Leaders and organizations often rely on the same limited set of individuals for ideas and input. In order to succeed in times of change and uncertainty, it's important to engage all employees. Make conscious efforts to include all individuals—not just a select subset.

“Leaders must move quickly to reestablish a connection with employees. This can only be accomplished with the kind of candor we see from the bravest of leaders . . .”

- **Interact with Employees Individually and Collectively**

“Be engaged with your people. Interact with them in a way that you understand their individual circumstances and concerns. . . . Keep people focused and motivated by being engaged with them more personally. . . . Use unit meetings and town hall meetings to provide employees with an opportunity to ask questions, provide input, and hear perspectives of peers . . .”

Employees are looking for a stronger sense of connection with the organization. Create specific opportunities to talk one-on-one with your staff members. Meet with the entire group periodically in formal and informal situations.

“Get your employees participating—they bring a light to things you may not have noticed on your own . . .”

- **Solicit Input From Staff Members**

“Solicit staff opinions frequently and take action on their suggestions whenever possible . . . Seek input on potential opportunities. . . . Get feedback from frontline staff regarding ways to improve efficiencies, cut costs, or increase income. . . . Listen to your staff’s feedback . . .”

Asking employees for their input is one of the greatest ways to get them more involved and actively engaged in the operation. You’ll get great input and employees will find themselves getting more committed to the organization.

“Look for spoken and unspoken signals coming from your people. Use your judgment to figure out when to reach out in caring and compassionate ways . . .”

“When there is room for involvement in decision-making, allow others to contribute. Solicit the opinions of staff on solving some of the difficult problems . . .”

Refine Your Ongoing Performance Management Techniques

“People are looking for leaders not to be wishy-washy. They want their leaders to be very clear about expectations. You need to give them benchmarks and hold them accountable . . .”

In times of change and uncertainty, people are looking for clear guidance about what is expected of them and how they are doing.

This is not referring to completing annual appraisal forms. It’s about establishing specific expectations and goals, monitoring and assessing performance, and discussing performance feedback on a consistent and frequent basis.

The Recommendations

Be Clear About Expectations

Emphasize Accountability

Provide More Frequent Feedback

Increase Positive Recognition and Reinforcement

Retain a Focus on Coaching and Development

• **Be Clear About Expectations**

“Align employee goals with the organization’s goals. . . . Set clear, realistic expectations and goals. . . . Provide clear direction to employees. . . . Clearly state what success looks like. . . . Establish what the right things are to be accomplished. . . . Communicate individual and team expectations . . .”

This is an extension of the theme of keeping people focused. Most people want to help, want to do the right thing. Your role, especially in times of uncertainty, is to be clear about what is expected. Work with your staff to ensure that they understand and commit to goals and expectations.

“For the most part, people want to do the right thing. Help them achieve their goals by being clear about what’s expected . . .”

• **Emphasize Accountability**

“Role model consistent performance and hold staff to the same standard. . . . Maintain accountabilities. . . . Hold individuals accountable for achieving their defined business objectives. . . . Run a tighter ship— hold people accountable for their actions or inactions. . . . Clearly define a timeline and milestones. . . . Follow through . . .”

Establishing expectations is only a first step in managing performance. Be clear with employees about the need to deliver on those expectations. In a nonthreatening way, emphasize the importance of achieving results. Offer support where needed. Monitor progress and help the employees track their own progress more closely.

“Expect great things of your people. They are capable of great things, but you must be crystal clear in making your expectations understood . . .”

• **Provide More Frequent Feedback and Support**

“It is critical that employees get feedback on their performance on a regular basis. . . . Do ongoing assessments of performance. . . . Ensure that performance expectations are being fully met. . . . Be fair and consistent. . . . Immediately address and correct undesired behavior. . . . Act to improve those situations when expectations are not met . . .”

Annual performance discussions are simply not enough. Immediate, timely and consistent feedback and support is particularly needed when people are feeling less certain and more vulnerable. Formal and informal feedback discussions reinforce expectations and help employees understand how they are doing and what they may need to continue or change.

• Increase Positive Recognition and Reinforcement

“Talk about successes. . . . Reinforce progress. . . . Continue to praise your staff members for good work. . . . Recognize and reward high performance. . . . Reassure employees that their hard work matters. . . . Be creative with rewards and recognition. . . . Be ‘intentional’ in how you recognize people. Be cognizant and respectful of what’s appropriate and effective with different people . . .”

Employees need to know they are viewed as valued, contributing members of the organization. In times of uncertainty, this need becomes even greater. Make sure you are looking for and creating opportunities to provide sincere, genuine praise and appreciation.

“There’s an opportunity for more recognition when people go above and beyond. Stretch performance must be reinforced. People need more recognition now . . .”

• Retain a Focus on Coaching and Development

“Continue to grow the group and individuals professionally. . . . Growth and development remain critical, if not more important. . . . Promote coaching, support and success at a level even higher than before . . . demonstrate your commitment to new skills required for new problems and solutions. . . . Observe more and coach more . . .”

Your role in coaching, mentoring, and developing your staff members takes on a greater importance in times of change. Place additional efforts on ensuring that people are clear about the new skills and approaches required. Support them in their efforts to adapt to the changing environment.

“In times of uncertainty and doubt, people want to know how they are doing and where they stand. Be candid and forthright . . .”

“Make the right decisions but be compassionate and caring. Always work to understand the right approach, the right decision, and the correct path forward. Simply put, figure out the right thing to do and do it . . .”

Leading the Business



KEY THEMES

- **Encourage Creativity and Innovation**
- **Raise the Emphasis on Resource Management**
- **Identify Opportunities for Future Success**

Encourage Creativity and Innovation

“I expect my leaders and teams to be clever, to think of new ideas. When things are going well, it’s easy to stick to what has always worked. It is imperative now to try new things and to be innovative . . .”

Times of significant change and uncertainty call out for new and different approaches. Doing more of the same will often not lead to the same results seen in the past. Leaders need to model the way in demonstrating openness to new approaches and to encourage and reinforce the same from their staff members.

The Recommendations

Raise Your Level of Flexibility

Model, Encourage and Reinforce Creativity

Emphasize the Need for Operational Improvements

- **Raise Your Level of Flexibility**

“Learn to adapt, modify and change quickly. . . . Be flexible and adapt to changing conditions. . . . Be agile and be willing to make changes yourself. . . . Stay flexible and open to change. . . . Have multiple action plans that can ‘change on a dime.’ Be ready to go in different directions at any time. . . . Stay nimble . . .”

It’s difficult to ask and encourage your staff to be flexible if you are not open to doing things differently yourself. Look for new ways to attack problems. Look at what’s worked in the past and see how they can be improved. Identify alternate approaches and solutions. Try a few new things each day or week.

“Anytime you see an opportunity to improve the business, take advantage of it . . .”

• Model, Encourage and Reinforce Creativity

“Challenge your staff and colleagues to be creative in taking on the current challenges. . . . Run your unit with the understanding that the world of business has changed. . . . Encourage and embrace diversity of thought and innovation in your organization. . . . Be encouraging in problem solving and finding new approaches . . .”

Think about some of the catch phrases you’ve heard in the past: Think outside the box. . . . There are no scared cows. . . . If it’s not broken, break it. . . . These are not new pieces of advice—they just apply so much more in times of significant change. Model them yourself and reinforce the creativity of your staff members.

“Leaders need to step back and look at the bigger picture. Put your company hat on, not just your unit hat. Look for new and different ways to do things . . .”

• Emphasize the Need for Operational Improvements

“Look for ways to improve the organization’s position. . . . Look for possibilities to improve the organization and your team instead of becoming defensive. . . . Don’t be afraid to make changes. Right now most upper level managers are open to new ideas and suggestions. Use this opportunity to make an impact. . . . Look for ways to improve business operations and to adapt to the changing environment. . . . Improve work processes to address the changing times . . .”

Get your staff members and teams to focus on changing and improving how work gets done. Don’t keep doing things simply because “we’ve always done it that way.” Lead your staff in discussions to uncover new approaches to getting the work done.

“Leaders need to encourage their staff to take risks and look at things differently. They need to help their people break through the conventional thinking . . .”

Raise the Emphasis on Resource Management

“We’re all in this together. Do more in order to get through the tough times. If you can figure out how to bring in more revenue, do so. Work smarter, do more with less. Pay more attention to expenses . . .”

The need to be more sensitive to resource management is especially critical when your organization’s significant change revolves around difficult economic and market conditions. The challenge is to place a greater emphasis on cost, resource and revenue issues while maintaining an appropriate demeanor and workplace environment.

The Recommendations

Manage Costs and Resources More Closely

Drive Efficiencies Throughout the Organization

Seek Out and Create Revenue Opportunities

- **Manage Costs and Resources More Closely**

“Use every dollar and every resource wisely. . . . Be especially conscious of expenses. . . . Be fiscally responsible. . . . Keep costs down and adhere to the budget. . . . Look at expense data closely. . . . Understand the use of cash and cash flow . . .”

Significant change driven by economic difficulties and uncertainties requires a much more stringent approach to cost control and resource management. Take the lead in this area and ensure that your staff members understand the fiscal realities facing the organization.

“Be extra vigilant. Be more careful regarding expenses, more vigilant on where we spend money . . .”

- **Drive Efficiencies Throughout the Organization**

“Review expenditures and see where the organization can move to a cheaper alternative. . . . Drive efficiency in project delivery. . . . Do more with less resources. . . . Work smarter—consider things to stop doing that are not adding value. . . . Emphasize efficiencies. . . . Seek ‘no cost’ or ‘low cost’ options to accomplish your priorities . . .”

Take the opportunity to review how work gets done. Look at the processes used and reexamine where you and your staff can build in more efficient and effective ways to achieve results.

“Run your unit, your department as though it were your business and the source of your personal, professional, and financial success—because it is . . .”

- **Seek Out and Create Revenue Opportunities**

“Look at revenue and profitability data more closely. . . . Focus on improving revenue and profitability. . . . Focus on non-traditional avenues of revenue. . . . Look for new revenue and funding opportunities . . .”

Focusing on costs and expenses is not enough to get through difficult economic times. Where appropriate, place a targeting focus on enhancing revenue streams and profitability. This is most obvious for sales and revenue generating groups. It also applies to other groups that can provide strong perspective and new ideas.

“Be alert to how we are spending the organization’s money to ensure that each dollar spent is contributing to our ongoing success . . .”

“Be prudent with decisions. Don’t mortgage the future for the benefit of the current state of the business . . .”

Identify Opportunities for Future Success

“Find the opportunities. Turbulent times often present great opportunity for those who are willing to take bold action . . .”

As much as there is a need to focus on sustaining short-term results, times of change and uncertainty provide leaders with a window to find and create opportunities that can have a tremendous impact on future, long-term success.

The Recommendation

• Look For and Create Opportunities

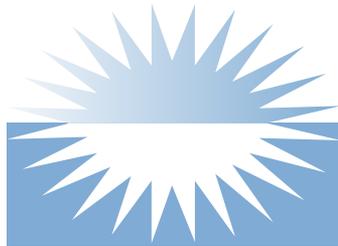
The senior leaders responding to the survey were exceptionally clear about the need to view periods of change and uncertainty as times of opportunity. Review their comments listed below as you consider how you can help your staff look for and create opportunities for future success.

“Often, unplanned changes lead to opportunities that we are often afraid of tackling in static times. . . . Consider these times as another opportunity to do something different and learn something new. . . . Times of change and uncertainty bring significant opportunities to an organization and its people. . . . Look for opportunities in the chaos. . . . Times of uncertainty and change should be a source of opportunity for effective leaders to rise to the challenge. . . . Seek out and create opportunities that we can benefit from. . . . Model a culture of looking at every situation for opportunities to provide value and to help clients . . .”

These words of advice and counsel build on everything presented in the prior chapters. Build these into your ongoing leadership practices as you look to help your organization and staff succeed in the short-term and long-term.

“This is a great opportunity for us to get some new and better habits that we can use when times are less uncertain . . .”

“These unique circumstances provide us with an opportunity to think differently, to behave differently, and to perhaps set new business practices which may result in different norms in the future . . .”



“Understand that the way we did business is not good enough any more. We must change to take advantage of opportunities that open up during this period of uncertainty . . .”

“Be bold. While everyone else is pulling back and hesitating to see ‘what will happen,’ we can be successful by taking action. Opportunity presents itself both in good times and bad . . .”

Summary of the Overarching Categories, Key Themes, and Recommendations

LEAD YOURSELF

- **Embrace the Increased Importance of Your Leadership Role**
 - » Embrace the Increased Importance of Your Leadership Role
 - » Understand the Changing Environment
 - » Management Yourself and Your Demeanor
- **Understand the Changing Environment**
 - » Educate Yourself About the Change
 - » Align Yourself With the Organization
 - » Get a Handle on the Big Picture
- **Manage Yourself and Your Demeanor**
 - » Lead by Example—Be a Role Model
 - » Stay Calm, Don't Overreact
 - » Be Positive
 - » Demonstrate a Sincere Care and Concern
 - » Take Care of Yourself

LEAD THE PEOPLE

- **Help People Get Focused**
 - » Reinforce the Core Mission and Vision
 - » Reassess and Confirm Priorities
 - » Focus on the Customer

- **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate**

- » Communicate Early, Communicate Often
- » Be Honest and Transparent
- » Ask, Listen, Respond
- » Share As Much Information As You Can
- » Combat the Rumor Mill
- » Communicate Upward to Your Managers

- **Engage Staff Members**

- » Involve and Include All Staff Members
- » Interact With Employees Individually and Collectively
- » Solicit Input From Staff Members

- **Refine Your Ongoing Performance Management Techniques**

- » Be Clear About Expectations
- » Emphasize Accountability
- » Provide More Frequent Feedback
- » Increase Positive Recognition and Reinforcement
- » Retain a Focus on Coaching and Development

LEAD THE BUSINESS

- **Encourage Creativity and Innovation**

- » Raise Your Level of Flexibility
- » Model, Encourage, and Reinforce Creativity
- » Emphasize the Need for Operational Improvements

- **Raise the Emphasis on Resource Management**

- » Manage Costs and Resources More Closely
- » Drive Efficiencies Throughout the Organization
- » Seek Out and Create Revenue Opportunities

- **Identify Opportunities for Future Success**

- » Look For and Create Opportunities

Wrapping Up: Action Items

You've read through all of the Overarching Categories, the Key Themes and the accompanying Recommendations. Consider how this advice from the 2009 survey of senior leaders applies to the current environment. Take some time and highlight a few action items that will help you be a more effective leader in times of significant change and uncertainty.

- **What do I want to CONTINUE doing?**

- **What do I want to START doing?**

- **What do I want to STOP doing?**

*“Good leadership practices are always important. They are just **SO MUCH MORE CRUCIAL** when times are difficult, when there’s so much change going on. In good times, effective leadership practices can be seen as less relevant. In difficult times, they are **CRITICAL TO SURVIVAL . . .**”*

“Leading through changing and uncertain times is a great experience. We will come out of this as stronger leaders!”

About the Author



Joe Raia is the founder and President of Glimmerglass Consulting & Training, a management and organization development consulting firm based in Silver Spring, Maryland. Joe's consulting and training expertise has been built through a solid mix of experience as an external consultant in the public, private, higher education and non-profit sectors and as an internal human resources executive in the broadcasting industry.

A highly regarded consultant, facilitator and speaker, he has helped countless leaders from the front lines to the executive offices be more effective and successful in engaging their employees and achieving results. C-level executives describe Joe's work as "game-changing," "creative and insightful," and "an example of wonderful partnership."

Prior to joining the consulting world, Joe spent over ten years as a human resource executive in the broadcast industry, including several years at NBC. He holds an M.A. in Industrial-Organizational Psychology from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and a B.S. in Psychology from the State College of New York at Oneonta.

When not working, Joe can be found outdoors on hiking and biking trails and in baseball parks.

About Glimmerglass

Since 1996, Glimmerglass Consulting & Training has provided client organizations with the highest quality leadership and organization development services and solutions. Our key areas of focus include:

- Leadership and Management Development
- Organizational Effectiveness
- Change Management
- Team and Meeting Facilitation

Specific to the work in this handbook, we offer in-person and virtual workshops for leaders at all levels. Highly interactive and participative, the workshops help leaders gain a more in-depth understanding of the key themes and build a personal plan for strengthening their leadership effectiveness. The workshops can be customized to highlight changes in your specific environment.

Contact us to discuss how our consulting, training, and speaking services can help you and your organization thrive in times of significant change. Call us at (301) 438-7240 or email us at change@glimmerglassconsulting.com.



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