

Dealing with Change in Uncertain Times: Tips for Leaders and Others

Compiled by the Staff of Cambria Consulting

As we enter a new year there are many things we can expect: new leadership in Washington, continued market volatility, economic challenges, a changing workforce, budget constraints, etc. How is your company prepared for these challenges? What would you want the newspaper headlines to say about your organization? Do your leaders have what it takes to navigate these turbulent times?

At a recent Human Resource Council Conference in Boston, Ellen Kumata, Cambria's Managing Director, shared insights learned from helping embattled executives as they fight for their companies' viability. The tips and resources in this paper were shared with conference attendees and designed with leaders in mind; however, many are also applicable to all employees, even if your company and its leaders are confident about the future.

Show Leadership

- 1. Be Informed.** Know everything you can about the root causes leading to market complexities. Research the implications for the Bank, your Group, and your team. In addition, consider what it may mean for other organizations and the market in general. Become familiar with similar situations that have occurred in the past and how those situations were resolved.
- 2. Be Calm and Confident.** During difficult or ambiguous times, a strong and positive leadership style is important. Leaders who have the best outcomes put aside their own personal concerns or doubts and maintain a calm and confident appearance in front of employees.
- 3. Provide Clear Direction.** Think about the current situation in the context of where you want to be in the future. Focus on aligning people around vision and strategy. This may mean devising new strategies, or it may mean reframing or reinforcing existing strategies with the current context. Take the time to think about the direction you want to provide; employees will look to you for this, and the impact of what you do now can last well beyond the immediate situation.
- 4. Develop an Action Plan.** Take stock of your situation — particularly strengths you can leverage, and develop an action plan. Taking action implies control over a situation and will enable your staff to maintain productivity and morale. Although you may be unsure of the outcome of a situation, you can't let it hold you back.

- 5. Leverage Your Supporters.** Those individuals who are strong, vocal supporters can serve as advocates for you. These individuals will be critical for validating your strategy and response to the situation, and they can help reinforce your messages to others and respond to those who are skeptics. Find these individuals, explain your approach, and explicitly ask for their support.

Related Articles

Anne Mulcahy: Leading Xerox through the Perfect Storm (*William George, Andrew N. McLean — Harvard Business Case, 2005*)

In 2000, Xerox faced bankruptcy amid a liquidity crisis, collapsed profitability, and an expanding SEC investigation. This case traces the career and leadership development of Anne Mulcahy, a former sales executive unexpectedly named COO of the beleaguered company as a last effort to turn Xerox around. It describes how Mulcahy assembled and motivated her team, framed her priorities, and filled her knowledge gaps in the face of critics doubtful of Xerox's ability to change.

http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/b02/en/common/item_detail.jhtml?id=405050&referral=2340

Masters of Disaster (*Regina Fazio Maruca — Fast Company, 2001*)

The author of this article asked twelve turnaround experts, from professors to investors to managers who have brought companies back from the brink, to give their recipe for rescue. Companies profiled include McCann-Erickson, Third Avenue Funds, IBM, and others.

www.fastcompany.com/magazine/45/one.html

Leadership in Crisis: Ernest Shackleton and the Epic Voyage of the Endurance (*Nancy F. Koehn, Erica Helms, Phillip Mead — Harvard Business Case, 2003*)

This case provides an opportunity to examine leadership in the context of Ernest Shackleton's 1914 Antarctic expedition, a story of crisis, survival, and triumph. It examines how, after the vessel became trapped in ice and crew abandoned ship, the commander shifted objectives to ensure survival of expedition members. Consider how Shackleton maintained team morale, loyalty, and commitment in the face of extraordinary mental and physical trials during almost two years in the Antarctic.

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Brookfield Properties: Crisis Leadership Following September 11th, 2001 (*Kathleen E. Slaughter, Elizabeth O'Neil — Harvard Business Case, 2003*)

Four properties Brookfield owns are adjacent to the World Trade Center site and on September 11, 2001, the terrorist attacks had an immediate impact on employees, tenants, and physical property. With little reliable information and in the face of chaos and human tragedy, the president and CEO developed an action plan to ensure safety, deal with grief and suffering, assess damage, enable the company to return to business, and reassure investors and media of commitment to restoring a position of market strength.

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Related Books

Crisis Leadership: Using Military Lessons, Organizational Experiences, and the Power of Influence to Lessen the Impact of Chaos on the People You Lead (*Gene Klann — Center for Creative Leadership, 2003*)

This book contends that while the highly charged and often dramatic events surrounding a crisis can profoundly affect the people in an organization and even threaten its survival, there are actions a leader can take before, during, and after to reduce the duration and impact of difficult situations. Crisis Leadership outlines those actions, concentrating on three important areas: communication, clarity of vision and values, and caring relationships.

www.amazon.com/Crisis-Leadership-Organizational-Experiences-Influence/dp/1882197755/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1206996975&sr=1-1

Leadership Agility (*Bill Joiner, Stephen Josephs — Jossey-Bass, 2007*)

Leadership agility is the master competency needed for sustained success in today's complex, fast-paced business environment. This book identifies five levels leaders move through in developing their agility. After describing essential competencies of agile leaders, the authors use real-life stories and examples to provide a clear road map that shows you how to bring these competencies to new levels.

www.amazon.com/Leadership-Agility-Mastery-Anticipating-Initiating/dp/0787979139/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1206996496&sr=1-1

Be Resilient

- 1. Be Optimistic.** Realize that when you react to adversity, you're reacting not to an event, but to how you feel about that event. You may not be able to control what happens to you, but you can control your attitude and how you perceive a situation. How you think and what you believe determine how you feel and what you do.
- 2. Accept Reality.** Recognize the situation for what it is. Remain calm and focused — even if it seems you are on the brink of disaster. People will try to shift your focus, divert your attention and speculate about things, but remaining focused and being calm and positive about how you can address the situation will help you manage through.
- 3. Identify Your Role.** Know what other members of your team and group expect from you and what you expect from them. Your interaction with senior leaders, peers, and other employees or constituents, should be clear, timely, positive, and transparent.
- 4. Be Innovative.** Resist the “only thing we can do” mentality. View seemingly difficult or insurmountable obstacles as opportunities for innovation and creativity that, in the end, could lead to a better and more productive way of operating or thinking about things. Do not compulsively implement the first known or traditional solution, but push yourself and others to devise several solutions and choose the most effective.

5. **“Stop the Car.”** At times, even if you’re sure to discover and implement a solution, the path itself to the solution can cause frustration and resentment. At these moments, it is important to “stop the car” and contemplate, both individually and collectively, the sources of these frustrations. This introspection can spur an emotional shift that helps spark creativity and transform both the situation and everyone in it.
6. **Stay Healthy.** Investing time, energy, and skill in an intense and balanced workout routine will engage the body at many different levels, enabling you to be more resilient, strong, and balanced, both mentally and physically. Eating a nutritional diet and ensuring you get enough sleep will also enable you to perform your best and respond effectively to anything that comes your way.

Related Articles

How to Make Yourself More Resilient (*Anni Layne — Fast Company, 2001*)

When 16-month-old Anna Grace Gimmetstad died from drinking contaminated Odwalla apple juice in 1996, CEO Stephen Williamson could imagine no greater tragedy, no larger crisis for a company founded on the principles of nourishment and integrity. Nevertheless, with odds stacked against him and lawsuits mounting, Williamson led his besieged company through a slow and painful recovery. Here, Williamson discusses tactics that guided him through Odwalla’s E. coli crisis and ultimately made him a more resilient leader.

www.fastcompany.com/articles/2001/03/odwalla2.html

Realizing What You’re Made Of (*Glenn E. Mangurian — Harvard Business Review, 2007*)

A ruptured disk pressed against Glenn Mangurian’s spinal cord several years ago, leaving the lower half of his body permanently paralyzed. The injury has taught him volumes about resilience and leadership. In this first-person account, he explains how people can create a new future after a crisis hits.

http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/b02/en/common/item_detail.jhtml?id=R0703J&referral=2340

The Making of a Corporate Athlete (*Jim Loehr, Tony Schwartz — Harvard Business Review, 2001*)

Management theorists have long sought to identify precisely what makes some people flourish under pressure and others fold. However, they have come up with only partial answers: rich material rewards, the right culture, and management by objectives. The problem with most approaches is that they deal with people only from the neck up, connecting high performance primarily with cognitive capacity. Authors Loehr and Schwartz argue that a successful approach to sustained high performance must consider the person as a whole. Executives are, in effect, “corporate athletes.” If they are to perform at high levels, they must train in the systematic, multilevel way that athletes do.

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How Resilience Works (*Diane L. Coutu — Harvard Business Review, 2002*)

Why do some people bounce back from life’s hardships while others despair? HBR senior editor Diane Coutu looks at the nature of individual and organizational resilience, issues that have gained special

urgency in light of the recent terrorist attacks, war, and recession. She identifies and explains three fundamental characteristics that seem to set resilient people and companies apart from others.

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Keep Learning

- 1. Find Opportunity for Growth and Learning.** Pressured situations often represent healthy personal challenges. They can provide a rush of adrenaline or burst of creativity enabling you to tackle new challenges and achieve the seemingly impossible. You can grow and learn immeasurably from how you handle them. Think about your current situation in this context and verbalize your constructive outlook to friends and colleagues so they can help reinforce the view.
- 2. Focus on the Long Term.** At the outset of a situation, no matter how pressured it may be, take some time think about what you can potentially learn. Think about it in the context of your broader career and development plans and set some goals for yourself. Identify how you can use the current situation as a means for achieving broader and longer-term goals.
- 3. Address Your Feelings.** In unexpectedly difficult or complex situations, strong feelings such as anxiety, frustration, and intimidation may be present. These feelings may be compounding the problem and should be addressed. Probe for the root cause of your feelings. Ask yourself why you feel the way you do, and as you find the answers think about concrete steps you can take to mitigate any feelings that could be detrimental to your ability to respond positively to the situation.
- 4. Observe First, Then Act.** When you start to feel challenged by a situation, think about the different ways you can approach the situation and what you can potentially learn from each approach. Test out the approaches that seem best. Observe what happens as you try each approach. Adapt, adjust, or change your approach as needed based on what you observe and learn as you go.
- 5. Control Your Reactions.** In high-pressure situations, individual sensitivities tend to be heightened. This could lead to some tense interactions and the potential for unproductive reactions to them. If you find yourself in one of these situations, take a deep breath and assess what is happening around you, view the situation from an outside perspective, and consider how you could be responding differently to minimize the impact or stress of the situation.
- 6. Learn from Others.** No matter how difficult or complex a situation, there is someone else who has faced something similar that you can learn from as you address the current situation. Seek out these individuals and be sure to get their perspective. In addition, consider what you can learn from your peers and others around you as they address the current situation. Observe what they do and the results of their actions. Think about what they do well and where there is room to be doing even better. Apply what you learn to your own actions.
- 7. Debrief as You Go.** While it is easy to be caught in the immediate urgency of a situation, step back periodically to review what you have done and learned to date both as an individual and as a group. Think about what you can learn from actions you have taken so far and redirect the course of action as needed.

Related Article

How to Play to Your Strengths (*Laura Morgan Roberts, Gretchen Spreitzer, Jane Dutton, Robert Quinn, Emily Heaphy, and Brianna Barker — Harvard Business Review, 2005*)

This article presents a tool to help you understand and leverage your strengths. Called the Reflected Best Self (RBS) exercise, it offers a unique feedback experience that counterbalances negative input. It allows you to tap into talents you may or may not be aware of and, so, increase your career potential.

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Related Books

Crucibles of Leadership: How to Learn From Experience to Become a Great Leader (*Robert Thomas, Warren Bennis — HBS Press, 2008*)

Experience may be the best teacher — but there's a hitch. Two people can have identical experiences, but one blossoms while the other is depleted. In this book, the authors conclude that what matters most is what one makes of experience, particularly the traumatic and often unplanned crucible events that challenge one's identity as a leader. What distinguishes leaders who grow through a crucible experience? Their approach to learning. Building on insightful and moving stories told by accomplished leaders, the authors offer probing self-assessments and innovative tools designed to help you develop your own Personal Learning Strategy.

http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/b01/en/common/item_detail.jhtml?id=1377&referral=2340

Managing Your Own Learning (*James R. Davis, Adelaide B. Davis — Berrett-Koehler, 2000*)

This book shows readers how to analyze their previous learning, design an action plan for future learning, expand their educational opportunities, and use libraries and the Internet effectively in order to become a proactive and perpetual learner.

www.amazon.com/Managing-Your-Learning-James-Davis/dp/1576750671/sr=1-1/qid=1160510751/ref=pd_bbs_1/002-0983427-9680003?ie=UTF8&s=books

Optimal Thinking: How to Be Your Best Self (*Rosalene Glickman — John Wiley & Sons, 2002*)

This book demonstrates how to maximize your talents, resources, and time; make the most of every opportunity; and achieve optimal personal and professional satisfaction.

www.amazon.com/Optimal-Thinking-Your-Best-Self/dp/0471414646

Communicate Effectively

- 1. Be Forthcoming.** Be as open with information as possible and tell it like it is (i.e., tell the truth). Make sure everyone knows what is happening and how to respond in a concrete and realistic way. In difficult times, people may have more questions than usual. One way to save yourself time is to explain as much as possible up front. Be prepared to respond to the highest level of scrutiny from individuals reacting to your actions or words.

2. **Monitor Your Messages.** Your words and actions affect the perspectives of others in your organization. Others will take cues from you and it's important to be selective with your messages and ensure they are positive and consistent. Ensure people know there is hope and that they will get through the situation.
3. **Keep Communication Lines Open.** Meet with staff members early and often. Start by asking open-ended questions such as "How is this affecting you? How is it going?" Take stock of their perceptions and legitimize their concerns as you discuss the reality. Maintain eye contact, appear relaxed, and avoid becoming emotional. Use this time to promote any available resources and to let employees know you support them. Oftentimes, the more employees talk, the faster the organization is able to recover.
4. **Listen and Respond Accordingly.** Listen to what others are saying and respond in a manner that shows you've heard them. Summarize what you hear and repeat it back using their language to demonstrate your understanding. Then, discuss what you can do to assuage any concerns. Different individuals will have different concerns and any messaging you do should address the particular concerns of each individual or group — but also be consistent with overall messages.
5. **Address Employee Concerns Quickly.** When difficult circumstances arise unexpectedly or are more complex than usual, people commonly express concerns about the ability to respond effectively. Leaders who acknowledge employee concerns gain respect and confidence. Those who act quickly to address them by providing a supportive workplace see higher morale, productivity, retention, and loyalty.

Related Articles

Improve Your Communication Skills (*Kellie Fowler, James Manktelow — Mindtools, 2006*)

There are multiple articles on this website to help you to understand effective communication and then show you how to communicate your message in the best possible way. Topics include questioning techniques, listening effectively, and communicating in a crisis, among others.

www.mindtools.com/page8.html

Crisis Communication: Lessons from 9/11 (*Paul Argenti — Harvard Business Review, 2002*)

Executives from a range of industries talk about how their companies — including Morgan Stanley, Oppenheimer Funds, American Airlines, Verizon, the New York Times, Dell, and Starbucks — went about restoring operations and morale following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. From his interviews with these individuals, the author distills lessons learned which may serve as guideposts for any company facing a crisis that undermines its employees' composure, confidence, or concentration.

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Related Books

The Transparency Edge: How Credibility Can Make or Break You in Business (*Barbara Pagano, Elizabeth Pagano, Stephen Lundin — McGraw-Hill Trade, 2003*)

Presenting nine behaviors beneficial for every leader, this text demonstrates that a transparent (clear and open) style will increase credibility, build loyalty, establish an impeccable reputation for integrity, and gain the trust of others.

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0071422544/qid=1076352856/sr=1-3/ref=sr_1_3/102-4293431-2068946?v=glance&s=books

Powerful Conversations: How High-Impact Leaders Communicate (*Philip J. Harkins, Warren G. Bennis — McGraw-Hill Trade, 1999*)

Filled with real-life examples from great leaders and communicators such as Jack Welch, Oprah Winfrey, and Howard Schultz, the author provides a blueprint for mastering the craft of powerful, productive conversations. The techniques offered are directed to help the reader achieve higher levels of performance, create and maintain valuable relationships, and forward personal and organizational goals.

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0071353216/qid=1076365001/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/102-4293431-2068946?v=glance&s=books