



Napoleon said, 'leaders deal in hope' (1). In our current crisis, this statement is relevant and important. Leaders are under tremendous pressure to provide a stabilising influence, projecting confidence, strength, and positivity (1) as they guide their people and organisations through recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We've seen many examples of strong leadership in recent weeks; those who have acted with transparency such as Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany who clearly informed her countrymen that they should expect a 70% infection rate, acts of courageous kindness such as the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern who asked people to, "...be strong, be kind, and unite..." when she effectively put her country into lock-down (2),

or the decisive choice of Sweden's leaders to swim against the tide and do what they believed was best for their people and economy by not imposing formal lockdowns.

And while it is often said that real leaders emerge from adversity (3), in a business context a small group of people at the top of an organisation are unlikely to have the capacity or the endurance to effectively process the volume of information necessary for decision making through an extended crisis (4). Over time they will become fatigued and burn out. Instead, leaders must identify those people in their organisation who will support their recovery efforts. These are trusted people leaders may delegate to now, who will provide back up and support through recovery.

In effect, you must find and enable your emerging leaders. If you don't already know who they are; identify them now. They are the individuals who regularly model the behaviours and culture valued by your organisation; those who are comfortable with uncertainty and adversity and are able to drive results within their team. They naturally emerge as the calm and stabilising the voice in the room who are able to bring others into a collaborative discussion. Consider people in all areas of your organisation - from the mail room to the operations floor.

Once you have done this, follow these steps;

**Engage with your leaders** - Leadership is not something we are born with (5). It is something that can be learned, fostered and mentored. You must engage with your leaders through a personal connection (6).

In the short term, this means having a one on one conversation with each of your leaders. Speak with them and find out how they are personally coping with the crisis. Share your own experiences and ask them for their support. This act of transparency and humility is a powerful builder of trust.

**Enable your leaders** – Promote problem solving and execution with your emerging leaders by creating opportunities for them to exercise authority and leadership.

To do this, organise your business into networks of teams, each led by one of your new leaders. Assign each team an area essential to your business recovery such as capital deployment, strategic positioning, or supply chain optimisation. Challenge each leader to foster communication and collaboration with their team while delivering their objectives. This enables leadership development and problem solving under high stress conditions.

**Empower your leaders** - when people feel empowered they will bring their full strength to the table to make effective and timely decisions.

While the natural instinct of a leader in crisis may be to consolidate decision making and control of information (5), this behaviour is ineffective for recovery. Your CEO should not be leading your crisis recovery team as their skills are necessary for matters of strategy and governance. A distribution of power lets the business use all of the human resources in its arsenal, and

provides an opportunity for leaders to ‘walk the talk’ in demonstrating how effective teams should operate.

In the short term, this very simply means giving your leaders decision making authority. Let them exercise their own leadership ‘muscle’ and develop their own style within their teams. By doing these things you are developing the future leaders of your business.

Leadership in uncertain and rapidly changing times cannot be done in isolation. It requires the strength, innovation and support of others. As leaders we must keep our finger on the pulse of those around us (2) and be conscious of their energy and emotions. Above all we must lead with empathy.

Posted on LinkedIn by Laura Sullivan

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/enable-your-emerging-leaders-through-crisis-laura-sullivan/>