

How Covid made me a better leader

Description

I'm generally an optimistic person. I tend to think of possibilities before I think about the risks. It helps make me more resilient in life because I'm thinking about how to make things better instead of wallowing in worry. But even the happiest and calmest person must have felt like throwing their zoom call screens off a tall building at one point this past year.

Despite the drudgery of self-confinement and Netflix being the only source of mental distraction, I found some interesting insights through this pandemic while watching Captain America: Civil War for the 753rd time (which has a great message on friendship). Do any of these concepts below ring true to you too or have you learned other things that I've missed?

Appreciation for finding meaning

The biggest thing that happened to me over the months and months of quieter time alone was to realize what is and what isn't important to me. And it wasn't what I thought it was before.

I've always been on a search for meaning in my life and looking to any source material I could find to make sense of this strange existence. Ultimately I had found some meaning in work, leadership as a means to give back to people that I led and help create something that wasn't there before.

But two things struck me that weren't obvious. One, my family is way more important to me and gives me purpose like nothing else. And two, my search for meaning at work wasn't over.

I've always focused a lot on work-life balance, never wanting to be the kind of leader that killed themselves with hours and hours in the office as some kind of sick badge of honor that I'm somehow more committed than anyone else. I preferred to manage my hours and work as little as possible while achieving my and the organization's goals. My measure of success is the \$/hr calculation where if I can lower the denominator then I'm getting more value with my time.

But even with that view I wasn't always fully checked into my family life. I found a new focus in the last year to really lean into my relationships and discover a lot more richness to the connections I already have. In fact, it is what sustained me through these rough times.

Even though I was getting meaning from my work helping the organization and the people there feel safe, heard, and empowered, it wasn't enough to make me feel like I was in "The Right Place". I needed more from my job.

So on top of focusing on productivity and how I could get the most out of my time, I began to think about whether I liked what I was doing and why I was doing it. I found that I wanted to be part of things that contribute to people and society in a more meaningful way. I began to look for those opportunities, and I think it makes me a more effective leader in the process.

Saving on commuting time

Have you ever tried to rationalize a 45-minute each-way commute to your spouse or family as a time to unwind? And did you see their eye-rolling and sarcastic expressions as they say “sure Dad”?

I tried hard to get productivity out of those frustrating and unpredictable drives: I listened to podcasts, I made phone calls, I mentally prepared for my day on the way in, and mentally unwound on my drive home. But the reality is that the pandemic proved to me it was all crap compared to actually being at home for that hour and a half.

Time is the only non-renewable resource, and when you get an extra 1.5 hours in your day, it's like a triple espresso with a Red Bull chaser to your productivity. I found myself having time to meditate and exercise and was more productive in my day overall.

This is probably the biggest reason why I think working-from-home is here to stay. People are actually more productive overall when they don't have to waste time getting to and from places. While face-to-face conversations are great for connecting people to each other, and building unity among a team achieving group goals, alone time can and should be allowed anywhere. With the mobility of data and devices now getting really efficient, companies should trust their employees and allow productivity wherever and whenever they want. If you are a leader struggling to allow people to continue to work from home, even part-time, then you should reflect on why you don't trust your team enough to take advantage of the engagement it can bring to your organization.

Work from home is here to stay and you may lose people if you insist on a hard line of coming back to the office full-time.

Stimulating a strategic review

There's nothing like a crisis to sharpen the mind; I doubt any business out there hasn't been affected by this past 18-month pandemic. Resilient leaders can handle crises because they are not expecting the world to be perfect. They accept life as it comes. The true measure of a leader is not whether you can predict and avoid issues, but how you get up and bounce back after being knocked down.

The “upside” of a pandemic is it universally knocks down just about everyone, and it gives you an opportunity to practice picking up yourself and your whole organization and seeing what can be done. The faster and better you can do this, the more advantage you bring to your organization.

I love periodic strategic reviews, to check in and validate that we are heading in the right direction, take stock of what's working and what's not and listen to the team about issues and successes. When a crisis hits, it's an obvious time to force that review and people are usually very willing to dive in

honestly and get creative.

Rallying to a common cause

Human beings are tribal by nature; from when we first started forming bands hunting in groups, to tattooing the Canadiens logo on our arm, we are drawn to be part of something bigger than ourselves. Your company, your organization can be that tribe, but you need a purpose.

The best teams in the world are on a mission. They aren't just happy, open, helpful, and energetic. They have a clearly defined purpose that everyone can get behind and push. Covid gives a lot of companies reasons to rally, and bring everyone in a team closer together. Whether it's to simply ensure your survival, or to expand into a new market or product line, or to help with humanitarian support and volunteer time and energy, there are abundant opportunities to get your team on a common cause.

There really is nothing more helpful to productivity and engagement than having a truly inspirational mission that your whole company gets. Think about the best teams that you have ever been part of: was there a purpose that everyone knew and was pulling for? I remember when we had a committed deadline to deliver the Global 7000 mockup for EBACE (European Business Aviation trade show) that could not be missed. I mean, there was a 100-foot long hole in the trade show booth that would be extremely embarrassing for the company if it didn't make it. The team that came together and worked tirelessly for 12 months was unstoppable. Everyone pitched in, gave more of themselves than ever before, and relished in the victory when it was delivered on time, and blew customers away at the show.

Practicing compassion

And finally, when something like Covid affects everyone in the world, we can step up and practice our humanity. I believe in leading with empathy, compassion, and drive simultaneously, but sometimes our drive to succeed and get results can cause us to lose sight of treating everyone with respect.

Some people have family or friends that suffered greatly or even passed away through Covid. Some people have suffered financially, losing jobs. Some people are going through intense emotional stress or having an increase in depression and anxiety. Some people may just be exhausted from the relentless hard news of the day that has been out there since February of last year.

It's important more than ever in these times to show compassion for everyone, listen more, be present more, and give people the encouragement to take the time they need to process what's been happening. Rallying around something important at work can help people to cope. Offering more external services like counseling and personal days can help. Just being someone to who they can express their concerns can help build trust in you, and help them weather this storm.

I have tried to be mindful of all this and I am convinced it has made me a better leader. How has this crisis helped your leadership?

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- Uncategorized

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