

How to Step Up Your Post-Pandemic Leadership Game



COVID-19 has not just impacted the world at large, but also it has also changed the DNA of our healthcare workplaces in many ways. Leaders must change and adapt communication and management techniques to lead effectively in this new era. HealthManagement offers healthcare leaders a few takeaways to consider in your newly transformed role.

If this pandemic experience has taught us anything, it's that leadership matters. In his 2020 book, *How to Lead*, David Rubenstein, cofounder of one of the world's largest private equity firms The Carlyle Group, features interviews with 30 nationally recognised leaders from differing areas - politics, business, and the military, among others.

While there may be no universal consensus leadership model, the leaders featured seem to share many common characteristics. During COVID-19, certain leadership traits and approaches may have made the difference between life and death. Here are seven recommended approaches from experts:

#1 Use Candour

While honesty has always been an important leadership trait, candour implies honesty without ambiguity. Arguably, the best antidote for a workplace climate of anxiety and cynicism is candour. People respond so much better to the known (even if it isn't great), than the unknown (which tends to cause more anxiety) or even worse misleading half-truths or irresponsible optimism (which may damage long-term trust).

#2 Provide Consistent Reliable Fact-Based Communications

Having consistent, reliable fact-based communications will be a key ingredient for bringing organisations together and reducing workplace anxiety during regular work periods, but especially during a pandemic or other times of extreme stress.

#3 Show Empathy

Leaders must become "counsellor in chief" during difficult periods. Leaders won't just need to have a natural sense about when a particular team member may need to be referred for counselling, take a break from a meeting that's degenerated into

conflict or even just need some heartfelt words of encouragement at the end of a long day. Consider changes to long standing policies and processes (e.g. sick leave, time off, telecommuting, etc.) to better fit the organisation's new normal. For leaders who aren't naturally empathetic, they should surround themselves with others who can help fill that gap.

#4 Manage Hybrid Teams

Many organisations have learned that they can reduce costs and create efficiencies by developing and supporting a more extensive virtual working infrastructure. As many workers have also grown accustomed to eliminating their commute or spending additional quality time with family, the demand for teleworking will likely increase in the future.

Managing hybrid, non co-located teams doesn't just require changes in facilities, but also a shift in mindset and even day to day operations. Sunil Prashara, President and CEO of the Project Management Institute warns that virtual/hybrid teams require a different style of leadership.: "If you just sit back and don't bring your virtual teams together regularly, work streams will fall apart," warns Prashara.

#5 Be More Flexible and Adaptable

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Faced with unprecedented uncertainty, leaders will need to avoid the temptation to “stick with a decision” in an attempt to appear decisive and instead be willing to regularly review new data, information and feedback and change course if necessary. Any delay in changing course could have drastic consequences for the viability of their business if not the health of their staff.

#6 Show Humility

Leaders are often expected to know it all and make perfect decisions, but obviously they are just as human and fallible as anyone else. One of the biggest mistakes leaders can make is pretending they know more than they do or making decisions relying only on their instinct or previous experience. Whether it's knowledge related to public health science, modeling, statistics, human resources or even legal issues, leaders will undoubtedly find themselves needing to rely on expertise that they don't themselves have in order to make the best decisions for the broader organisation.

#7 Be an Active Listener

As workers return to the office, an undercurrent of anxiety will undoubtedly remain. In this instance, it may be just as important for leaders to listen as to lead. Indeed, this may be one of those rare situations where hierarchy matters less and mass opinion could actually dictate next steps for the organisation. Indeed, there is a difference between listening and waiting to talk and for many leaders, their ability to shift gears into “listening to understand” versus “listening to respond” will be a key ingredient for their success.

These aren't the only active traits that matter for leaders during pandemic times, but these represent seven key ones.

What drives you as a leader? As you return to the office, now is a perfect time to consider how to adapt your leadership style and try new ways to positively interact with your staff team.

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