How to Be a Leader Who Brings Unity and Calm to Your Team

October 17, 2020 10 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

> *"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way." – John C. Maxwell*

Life got messy in 2020.

It's not just the virus. It's the way the virus has changed everything we once took for granted—from the way we work to the way we *get* to work.

Or don't get to work, as the case may be.

Although forecasts and timelines vary, one thing is clear: COVID-19 is here to stay.

The rest is largely unknown: particularly regarding decisions made by businesses and individuals.

Researchers predict that COVID-19 will continue to cause mayhem and distress for years to come. Intermittent lockdowns and panic-buying will simply become a part of daily life. And, if a vaccine is finally approved, international deal-making will probably get in the way.

More people will be affected, and even more people will stay at home.

Many of us are only just starting to realize that there may

never actually be a time when we go back to “how things were before.” And those feeling it the most are the faithful nine-to-fivers.

This time last year—before COVID-19 was even heard of—a large proportion of the working world spent their day at the workplace. We showed up at work, did our job, and went home again. It was also where we engaged in the bulk of our daily social interaction: where we discussed projects with colleagues, attended meetings, shared a lunchroom, and chatted idly around the watercooler.

Over 40 million people have lost their jobs since COVID-19 hit. The rest of us have been forced to stay home and have conversations with our screens. Research by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) estimates that around two-thirds of Americans are now working remotely due to COVID-19.

And boy, are we feeling it.

Related: Four Ways Businesses Can Support Employees’ Mental Health Amid COVID-19

From remote by choice to remote by force

It’s true that even before the pandemic struck, remote work was on the rise. The last five years have seen a 44% growth in people working anywhere from their kitchen table to beachfront cafes in Bali. But here’s the difference: it used to be a choice.

For many, the digital nomad lifestyle is the way forward. Christian and Rasmus Mikkelsen (the Mikkelsen twins) recently launched PublishingLife, a fully remote education company that helps other entrepreneurs build their own online business.

Although they initially considered setting up a corporate

office, they realized the benefits of staying remote far outweighed bringing their staff into one location. They are now determined to remain 100% remote as their business grows, as per the general trend.

“For businesses that were already partially, or completely, operating remotely, the effect of coronavirus was minimized because employees could continue about their business whether they’re at home, traveling abroad, or in quarantine,” says Rasmus. “Companies with big corporate offices were forced to close their buildings and send workers home, which has been surprisingly effective and successful.”

They firmly believe that despite the massive impact that coronavirus has had on the business world, remote work could be a powerful model for the new age.

“Even after the pandemic is over, I think we will see a lot of businesses keep many of their employees remote,” says Rasmus. “It’s a huge benefit to the business because it saves employees valuable time commuting to and from work. Plus, the physical location is no longer an obstacle when hiring. It is an even bigger benefit to the worker because it creates an endless number of work opportunities, and people love the freedom of remote work. Work on your own schedule from anywhere in the world. How could it get any better?”

Sure, there are numerous benefits to remote work, and many companies have been able to weather the economic downturn purely by sending their workers home. Google Inc. recently announced that most of its 200,000 employees will continue working from home until July 2021.

But nine months into this mess, the novelty has started to wear off. And it’s taking a huge toll on our mental health.

The mental impact of remote work

In the absence of daily preparation and training, even the most competent may struggle to perform and engage as well as they did previously. Those who are new to working from home have reported feeling isolated, disconnected, and anxious.

Working remotely means you can't just knock on the boss's door when you have a question. Lack of face-to-face supervision and the inability to 'reach out' may mean the work doesn't get done. Reduced motivation can quickly lead to a lack of productivity, which only reinforces the despair and worry.

We're also missing a vital component of standard human interaction: physical body language. A rushed or particularly blunt email from a boss or colleague can quickly be interpreted as a sign that the sender is angry. When working in the same environment, we might otherwise know that they're just having a bad day. Reading the tone of voice in text is a job in itself.

Above all else is a new and pervading sense of loneliness. Those who live alone or don't have opportunities to connect with others in their remote-work environment may be particularly vulnerable to stress and depression.

Meanwhile, those with other commitments in their personal lives are now contending with multiple distractions – restless kids, pets, partners, chores—all which make for a suboptimal work environment.

Related: Why Your Mental Health is the Key to Your Success in Business

Why leaders need to tune in to

their workers

COVID-19 has already brought an enormous amount of stress into our lives. What with the daily pandemonium of supermarket queues, health fears, stringent hygiene, media reports, and general anxiety, virtual work commitments can seem a little overwhelming.

This is where leaders and managers need to put themselves in their workers' shoes and realize what they may be facing.

In becoming more conscious, managers and business owners can make an enormous difference to the way their employees get work done. Better yet, they can help their employees continue to give their best and positively impact the organization.

Social media marketer Kim Barrett from Your Social Voice specializes in helping business owners succeed online. He believes that from 2021 onwards, businesses will change in ways that have never been seen before.

"Leaders in business are going to have to put all stakeholders' interests first, rather than just their own bottom line," he says. "The tide has gone out on the business owners that only care about their own profits. As Warren Buffet famously said, "All those that were swimming with no pants have been exposed."

Now, says Kim, is the time for a new kind of management: one in which leaders are called on to demonstrate the kind of behaviors they expect and need from the people that work for them. "I'd expect to see that exponentially increase in 2021 and onwards as the truly conscious leaders step forward and lead by example."

The advent of the conscious leader

Much of the way we operate stems from unconsciousness—learned patterns that have been ingrained in us since birth. We often don't even think about what we do or how we do it.

But if leaders are going to see their companies through the pandemic, they will need to engage more with their workers. This means recognizing common humanity—the fact that every employee is an individual with needs.

Consciousness, at its most basic, is awareness. For leaders, the capacity to understand a worker's personal circumstances can help them create a conscious culture where people know what's expected. To be effective and thrive, employees need to know that they're understood.

Digital Nomad Summit founder Olúmidé Gbenro believes that conscious leadership has been a long time coming. And now, it's more important than ever. But to implement consciousness successfully, businesses in all niches will need to take a holistic approach.

"When it comes to community building, we focus our attention a lot on mental health," he explains. "Being an online entrepreneur, people can often be in front of the laptop too much. Traveling as a digital nomad may seem great, except it's not always easy to find friends and connect with other human beings."

"Being a conscious leader in this case means emphasizing the importance of socializing and supporting everyone in our community. It's creating a safe space so we can all coexist and grow together at our own pace."

This can be as simple as having conversations around mental wellbeing. Workers need to know they have a safe space to speak up about how they're coping at home, and what to do if

they’re not.

Robert B. McGuinness, business coach and founder of Soul Venturer, says that leaders now need to honor what he calls the ‘soul standard’. “I believe this is going to change the future of employment and the future of entrepreneurship. The days of going into business solely for money won’t work in the new economy. The real currency is impact! Impact that comes from the depths of who you are.”

“In this new economy and society, the need for our deepest and most authentic desires are at our fingertips. If you aren’t doing something that is deeply aligned with who you are at your core, I believe it is going to be deeply challenging to find something sustainable for you in the future.”

Related: 4 Ways Conscious Entrepreneurs Elevate Humanity Through Business

Strategies for becoming more conscious

1. **Actively listen to your employees.** Look for what isn’t being said rather than what is. Observe communication in all forms—spoken and written—and try to understand how the worker felt when they made that communication.

2. **Listen to yourself.** Does your inner voice criticize you or encourage you? Whatever you’re hearing from within will influence the way you treat others. Focus on developing the self-awareness that fosters positive thinking.

3. **How’s that tension?** COVID-related stress affects us all, and that stress can turn even the most gentle leaders into monsters. Schedule some time for true relaxation and stress reduction. Make sure to encourage your employees to do the same.

4. **Be present.** Whether you’re in a virtual meeting or writing an email, be aware of where you are. Try to keep your mind from wandering into other places. Thinking about what you did yesterday or what needs to be done tomorrow will only rob you of what needs to be done *now*.

5. **Slow down.** This situation isn’t changing anytime soon. What good will rushing do? How will rushing make your workers feel? Anxiety can make you appear fiery and out-of-control, which will only make people panic. Take a breath. Respond when you’re calm.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/357488