

Leading during a Lockdown.

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So, you are at home for days. You have long passed the “this is fun stage” and are now entering the “don’t feel like getting out of bed phase”. You’re probably wondering what the world will look like when we get to the other side of this crisis. If you are responsible for leading people, any group of people, then this crisis has both an up-side and a down-side for your leadership relationships.

I would like to place in front of you a leadership challenge.



We know that modern leadership has increasingly focused on the quality of the relationship between the parties. Great authentic leaders have great relationships with their followers. We know that trust develops as a consequence of the relationships we have with our people. We also know that if people trust us, we gain the leadership “superpower”, *“The power of influence.”*

But what will be the impact of social distancing and isolation on these special relationships. Again, we know that leadership is less about theory and more about choice and action.

Our modern world provides us with a host of tools we can use to build and enhance our relationship with people during social distancing. One thing is for sure, when we emerge from our homes; social media, virtual meetings and online learning will have become commonplace. You may have mastered these or maybe you have just started playing with some of them; now is the time to gain a level of mastery. While every situation is different, we would like to workshop a few ideas with you. While you may have some of these in place already, some may emerge as new ideas.

1. *WhatsApp groups* - It is commonplace these days to set up a WhatsApp group between yourself and your followers. While some of these WhatsApp groups are work focused, there is no reason that a WhatsApp group does not create an informal social dynamic between you and your team. I have been part of a national organisation whose WhatsApp group is used to actively support employees, compliments them on their successes, celebrates birthdays and graduations, and commiserates in times of difficulty.



Idea – set up a lockdown WhatsApp with your team. Challenge your team to share their best lockdown pic, a quiz, their favourite song, a poem or advice on where to find the best price on groceries.

2. *Zoom, Skype or Google meetings* - these tools are not just useful for business meeting purposes but can also be used to connect people.



Idea - How about a 20-minute zoom “stand-up meeting” where everybody checks in on everybody else for a few minutes. This is an incredibly powerful *leadership moment*. As a leader, our people really experience our leadership when we facilitate a meeting like this.

3. *Online learning experiences*. The fact that employees are at home during isolation does not mean that the learning needs to stop. Instead now is the time we can really enhance skills, including new skills which will help us adjust to a new world. Each subordinate has different needs and it is entirely possible to find resources for many of these needs.



Idea - How about setting up a learning plan - just ask your subordinate for an hour a week. Send them an article to read and then ask them to send you their comments about the article. This simple learning process meets all requirements of adult teaching.

4. **Coaching** – one-on-one coaching is the “one big tool” for a leader. Sadly, we never have time to do this as we chase targets and face business challenges. During isolation we now have an opportunity to do this and to do it well. How to coach, well the simple model includes the following: **1. Asking good questions.** Like what are you concerned about, how could you best use your time. What do you think we, as a business, have learned during this time? **2. Really listening.** We tend to listen and simultaneously think up a response. When you coach you listen without judgement, only to understand. **3. Empower** – if your question was on point, then usually your subordinate will have provided an answer which could make it easy to ask the next question – “so how will you put this into place, or how could I help you?”



Idea - set up one meeting per day (Skype/Zoom/Google or even a WhatsApp Video call) with a different subordinate. The agenda could be - how are you doing? What is happening at home? When we get back to work what do you most want out of your career? How can I help you? What do you need from me?

5. **Support** - During the forms of contact above, it is very possible that you pick up that one of your people is taking strain. This is a **leadership moment**. We can choose to be politely distant, or we can choose **to be there for them**. I am convinced that if we are there for our people during personal crisis, they will be there for us when it counts. Importantly, being there does not mean that as a leader, you have to solve their crisis! Just please try not to say dumb things, you know the ‘*a friend of mine also went through what you are experiencing, and she.....*’ Just listen and be a support!



Idea – Ask a simple question of a stressed subordinate. “You sound really freaked out, what is keeping you awake at night?” And then just listen.

When we connect with our people during this lockdown, we are not interrupting their “Holliday.” This is not a Holliday; this is a crisis! And if they are lucky, it is a paid crisis, so we should not be hesitant to engage and keep in touch with our people.

So, let's go back to the basic question. If you are the leader of people, then we want to be clear.

Leadership is a choice.

We can choose to sit this out, watch Netflix and freak ourselves out on Facebook. Alternatively, great leaders will make a different choice. Leaders can choose to turn this period of isolation into a *leadership moment*. Leaders can put in the effort to build the relationship with their people during this downtime. I'm not talking about harassing them, and I'm not suggesting that we begin sending "cheap pictures from Pinterest". I am suggesting that we use this time to enhance the relationship, and to do this unencumbered with the pressures of delivering performance.

Just imagine the difference - one leader went on lockdown and emerged having to pick up the pieces with his/her team and start again. The other used the time to build and enhance the relationship. This leader has kept in touch, has shared and journey through the crises with their team. This leader has had meaningful discussions with their people about their futures and has invested in their growth, throughout the period.

In who's shoes would you prefer to stand when this is over.



"Leadership is a choice – turn off Autopilot and take control of your Leadership decisions."