Exceptional Leadership in Times of Change: Managing Teams
Gratitude Network Think Piece, Part II of III

In today's unpredictable pandemic world, we have a choice as leaders: to survive and get through it, or to thrive and position ourselves and our organizations for the opportunities that exist in the "next normal." Leaders at every level will require a new worldview and set of tactics to thrive in these uncertain times—and beyond.

The Gratitude Network is a globally recognized leadership development organization that works with growth-stage companies and global social entrepreneurs to enhance CEO skills and strengthen their leadership teams. We have two central programs. The **GOLD** program works with leaders at mid-sized, growth-stage companies. Our year-long **Fellowship** targets social entrepreneurs around the world who are working with children. Our organization has worked with nearly 150 CEOs in the past five years, and our team has hundreds of years of collective experience working with organizational leaders.

In the Spring of 2020, we interviewed and observed several dozen CEOs and HR leaders of growth-stage organizations (both for-profit and not-for-profit). We have learned:

- What great leadership will look like as we emerge from this economic and health crisis.
- What elements are vital for excellent leadership through and after this crisis.
- What leaders need to do to create their best possible future.
- How leaders can best prepare themselves and their organizations for success in this new reality.
- How leaders can create organizations that *thrive* rather than survive.

We hope that in reading this series of three pieces that you will: gain some insight into leadership issues and strategies to manage them in the pandemic and post-pandemic world, find the work of The Gratitude Network interesting and deep and reach out to Gratitude Network to explore customized solutions to your leadership development needs.

Great leaders have a keen awareness of their own personal leadership strengths and limitations. They recognize the team dynamics within their leadership ranks, as well as the managerial and executive leadership challenges of their organizations. This series of white papers addresses each topic in turn. **This paper, Part II of III, covers Team Leadership.**

In these unprecedented times, leadership has been and will continue to be affected on three levels: personal, team, and organizational.

- Personal
  - How leaders behave now will not only affect their legacies as individual leaders but will also have ripple effects for their employees, company, and stakeholders.
  - Most of us are accustomed to change but don't have all the tools required to adapt to the change.
- **Team**
  - **Communication is crucial; leaders must make recognition an integral practice to capture the attention of the team, the organization and senior leadership.**
  - **Decision models are being disrupted by virtual work.**
  - **When individuals feel disconnected from the team, it is difficult to work collaboratively and remain motivated.**
- Organizational
  - Organizational leadership is not just about *readiness*; it is also about *building the future* that the organization wants.
  - Leaders should be clear about where their organizations are going but flexible in how they get there.
  - Leaders need to build the capacity for *resilience* into their organization so that it continues to function in the face of change.

These points are addressed in more detail throughout this piece.

Commented [1]: Since we can't read the labels, this graphic detracts from rather than adding value. Could the text be bigger?

TEAM LEADERSHIP

Effective and strong leaders navigate <u>teams</u> through tremendous change by creating an inspiring vision of the future, setting goals and clear expectations, and providing concrete feedback in the real and increasingly virtual world of work. Leaders of high-performing teams know that ***decision models—how teams interact and problem-solve—have been disrupted by virtual work.***

<u>Strengthening and Maintaining High-Performance Teams in a Changing Environment</u>

As with personal leadership, trust and transparency are core elements of high-performance teams, especially in times of change. In addition, the ability of a team to hold itself <u>accountable</u> and commit to the direction the team leader has set is critical to success.

Searching for solutions, identifying best practices, and creating the ideal working environment through team discussions will ease stress and build trust within a dispersed team. Leaders will need a new focus on enhancing engagement and managing productivity from afar.

Feedback and recognition in times of change are even more important than ever before. Leaders must capture the attention of the team when offering feedback so that all will experience it and it is readily visible to all levels of the organization. To do this, leaders must engage their teams, perhaps seeking *new* ways to recognize and reward as a regular practice. As they are adapting and creating new ways to work and build cohesion, engagement can be more difficult with remote teams.

> *CASE STUDY: One organization the Gratitude Network supports has historically operated in "distant/remote" mode. Consequently, the quarantine has not caused significant disruption to the team's normal operating mode. However, recognizing the taxing, unusual circumstances, together with changes in routine (children at home 24/7, spouses working at home, stress, ambiguity, fear), the team began meeting twice as frequently as during normal times. In addition, meetings early on in the crisis began with check-ins to assess how everyone was doing personally. Finally, the team embarked on a self-assessment process to ultimately create the strongest teamwork experience any of the team had participated in. Rather than "hunkering down" in the crisis, the moment was taken as an opportunity for intense team development.*

Great leaders are skilled at providing frequent feedback (both positive and constructive), clarifying priorities and goals, and recognizing ingenuity and creativity, along with showing understanding and compassion for those *just getting through* difficult realities. New technology and tools (Platform 15Five, Office Vibe, Survey Monkey) enable leaders to better manage feedback cycles.

Agile Management of Virtual Teams

Virtual (or distributed) teams are being forced to learn new ways to communicate and get work done. For many, the world of virtual teamwork is new and includes video conferencing and other team communication tools and apps that may be unfamiliar. Allowing time for creativity and being aware of virtual burnout are new parts of enhancing team performance.

Successful leaders both create opportunities for team-building and set professional expectations. These professional expectations include modeling, demonstrating agility and adaptability, and providing coaching and feedback. Such leadership is critical in building the new team culture and reducing stress.

Virtual work disrupts decision models and changes decision-making levels. Agile leaders have the ability to identify who is in the best position—at the specific point in time and with the right information—to make the best decision. Great leaders know when to step aside and allow others to lead; they provide opportunities for team engagement in the creation of the future. No one likes *being* changed, but participating in creating the future leads to commitment to rather than reluctant

> *CASE STUDY: One Gratitude Network alumna, based in one location, with much of her program personnel in a distant area, has completely pivoted her usual reporting patterns. She has instituted daily phone calls and brainstorming to address what seemed like endless discussion without resolution. The problem-solving sessions have become group/team problem-solving, with communication heavily ramped up.*

compliance with the changes and decisions that are made.

Teams need to be included in defining the next normal and then developing pathways to align with the future direction. Great leaders encourage their team's voices in decisions made about the future, which will lead to enhanced support of new goals, objectives, and changes.

Clarity of Vision, Purpose, and Focus

Clarity, for purposes of this paper, encompasses team and organization-wide leadership, focusing on meticulous and insightful strategic planning and product & service pivots.

Clarity of vision, a clear expression of the future, and well-articulated goals and expectations give organizations structure and build trust. When change comes suddenly, great leaders articulate an inspiring vision of the future and create a path for others to follow.

Successful leaders are purposeful and aware of the messages they are sending with their presence, their voice, even their timing, and must be able to manage the change created by this socially distant world of employees, teams, suppliers, and customers.

Authenticity, confidence, context, and openness play a key role in managing team priorities, engagement, objectives, and interactions.

Even for teams for whom remote work was an integral part of their prior functioning, the imposition of the fully virtual team changes the landscape in dramatic ways. Increased ambiguity about near-term and longer-term goals can drive teams off-track and away from the core mission of the organization. Now, more than ever, goals and expectations should be communicated clearly and updated frequently. Short-term goal-setting to keep work on track, performance metrics that are connected to the new reality, and virtual work accountability should be priority discussions among leadership teams. Not everything is equally important, but what is most critical should be clearly identified, articulated, and measured. Clarity of priorities sets the team on a track for success.

Communicating—even over-communicating within teams—is a must. As one CHRO advised, "Leaders must be a part of the transformation by communicating up, sideways, and down. Be included and be inclusive." Communicating often and authentically ensures that the team is on the same page, despite being virtual, and ensures that the team is able to understand, commit to, and engage in the direction set by top leadership. According to George Bernard Shaw, "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." Communicate, communicate, communicate.

TAKEAWAYS

Great leaders earn the trust and confidence of their employees. There is no better way to do this than to show empathy, true concern, and a bit of vulnerability. How leaders behave in times of change or crisis will impact the long-term success of their employees, their teams, and the company. Personal awareness, understanding of one's EQ, and the ability to listen and be empathetic are key in ensuring tomorrow's success.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a unique opportunity for deep leadership self-reflection: How can I proactively take ownership of my own leadership style and balance? What can I do to impact and lead my team? How does the quality of my teams' collective leadership decisions affect the culture, communication, and focus of my entire organization? The pandemic has given us, as leaders, a "glass half full/glass half empty" moment. Do we as leaders bemoan the loss of the way it used to be and fight against what it is now? Or do we use it as an opportunity to rebuild ourselves, our teams, and our organizations to emerge stronger, more empathetic, more agile, and more prepared for the next storm that hits?

Great teams can be created or enhanced during times of change. Great leaders share their vision of the next normal with both confidence and vulnerability. Clarity of vision, messaging, and action will enable others to focus on that future. Successful leaders consistently and clearly speak about what is important to ensure and facilitate the action of employees and teammates. Enhancing communication in the virtual, socially distant world and having clarity and flexibility around designing the best future are imperative skills for our future leaders. Leaders need to understand new decision models and how to manage change.

This is a moment to examine personal, **team**, and organizational leadership in the context of a next normal. It is an opportunity to examine current methods and assess the potential for enhancement,

expansion, and a departure from past strategies in order to thrive in our "new reality." Your employees will observe carefully and remember how you behaved as a leader during challenging times.

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Why did the Gratitude Network author this piece?

The Gratitude Network is a global leadership development organization that works with CEOs, Chief People Officers, founders, and emerging leaders and teams.

The Gratitude Network is poised to support leaders in organizations as they navigate their own course and build their own "next normal."

We have successfully piloted a new paradigm of organizational leadership development called GOLD (Gratitude Organizational Learning & Development) that is results-driven and includes team learning and informative interactions, 1:1 leadership coaching, and cross-functional communication. We are currently working with several companies that feel *now,* more than ever, the need to support their leaders as they lay new organizational foundations.

Gratitude GOLD creates the leaders that your organization needs now and in the future. Our fully customizable program is focused on your organizations' leadership, working across silos, team dynamics, accountability and personal leadership. The program can include as few as six key leaders or dozens; we can work with these leaders for six weeks, six months, a year, or longer. We work with senior management to determine your company's needs and produce a one-of-a-kind experience to transform your leadership.

The Gratitude Network and its team of coaches help grow leaders and enable them and their organizations to thrive. It doesn't matter who they are, what they do, where they are or how big or small they are.

If you would like to be one of these forward-thinking organizations and would like to learn more about our GOLD program, contact:

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