



***Exceptional Leadership in Times of Change: Personal Leadership Acuity
Gratitude Network Think Piece, Part I 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.

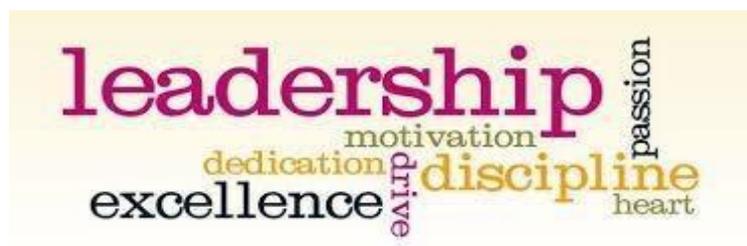
Great leaders have a keen awareness of their own personal leadership strengths and limitations. They recognize the team dynamics within their leadership ranks, as well as the managerial and executive leadership challenges of their organizations. This series of white papers addresses each topic in turn.

This paper, Part I of III, covers Personal 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.



PERSONAL LEADERSHIP

The strongest leaders with whom we've worked know their leadership style, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and set an example for others by embracing their own wellness and resilience. During a crisis, leaders must continue to manage others, while adapting their leadership style to match the situation. One thing is certain: **how leaders behave now will have long-term implications for the people they lead.**

Adapting Personal Leadership Style in Times of Change

Good leaders understand that working on their leadership style is an investment in their future success *and* in the future story they hope to create. Teams are inspired or weakened by the actions of the leader.

A leader's success is contingent on a strong understanding and self-awareness of their own emotional intelligence and empathy. Why are empathy and self-awareness so important in today's environment?

- Great leaders model appropriate behavior and guide their teams to define and respond to new realities.
- Great leaders have significant responsibility toward those they lead. In a challenging and noisy landscape, leaders need to adjust, adapt, and remain flexible.
- Virtual interactions demand a different level of self-awareness.
- Great leaders are purposeful and aware of the messages they are sending with their physical presence, their voice, and their timing.

Great leaders know their EQ ("Emotional Quotient") strengths and use those strengths to lead and influence. They are aware that everyone experiences this crisis in a different way. Fears, uncertainty, and economic instability may create significant stress for employees. Addressing these stressors and giving teams time to share them will create trust, which is imperative as leaders show the way to the defined future.

Empathy is a core component of EQ. Successful leaders understand the importance of empathy and know how to build an empathetic dialogue. True empathy requires deep listening, and this deep listening can be the foundation for establishing greater connections, trust, and highly engaged and productive teams. Leaders who listen and allow time for focused thinking enable employees to participate in upcoming changes and to help define the future.

Empathy and vulnerability build trust within teams. Leaders who are transparent in their actions, communications, and expectations and show vulnerability succeed in building strong and resilient teams. This transparency is demonstrated by behaving in a way that aligns with one's values and expectations. Transparency, consistency, and access to leaders are key components in building trusting, authentic relationships and loyalty to the organization and its mission.

CASE STUDY: A Bay Area tech leader that Gratitude supports has realized that her autocratic style from previous years is failing to work in a distributed work environment. She has been forced to identify and adapt her leadership style significantly and learn to delegate and trust people to get their work done. Where previously she would micro-manage on key projects, she now has more frequent meetings that are focused more on outcomes rather than processes. The team is asked to hold one another responsible. She has specifically re-cast herself as "coach" to her team members, frequently asking them, "What can I do to help support you in getting that done?"

Self-Care and Work-Life Balance

During times of change, stress creeps in. Many of us have experienced a lengthy day of virtual meetings, difficult personnel decisions, cash-flow issues, and more. In this difficult environment, self-care and work-life balance at the individual level are key. Perspective and balance ensure the proper footing for a strong personal leadership style and set a positive example for a leader's team and organization.

A variety of actions can bring about this balance and enable a healthy work life, such as:

- Managing stress and setting boundaries
- Making time for exercise
- Making time for family
- Enjoying moments of humor
- Practicing mindfulness, yoga, and/or meditation
- Play--improv theater, coloring, hobbies, crafts--just a few examples
- "Just taking a break"

CASE STUDY: Many of the leaders that the Gratitude Network has worked with have reported unique opportunities to focus on their personal development and life balance during the pandemic. One leader shared that his work from home was difficult for his young children to understand (they didn't realize he was "at work" and wanted to play all day long), so he has begun to block in calendar time specifically for his children each day. Several leaders have reported they are exercising, meditating and reading more, or have dedicated extra "found" time (from reduction in commute times) to learning experiences, such as attending courses, taking a Master Class, or learning new yoga positions via YouTube.

Great leaders know when enough is enough. They take time to gain perspective from balancing their work with other key aspects of life and appropriately modeling it for their teams.

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?

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.

With Gratitude ... to the authors of this piece:

Laura Traxler - Board Member, Gratitude Network

Ann Singer - Director, Programs, Gratitude Network

Randy Haykin - Founder, Gratitude Network

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:

Ann Singer
The Gratitude Network
415-876-9718 / ann@gratitude-network.org