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AMY VETTER

How to Lead During a Crisis

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Amy Vetter, CPA • Apr. 27, 2020



At this point, there's no point in pretending that things are anywhere close to normal. The coronavirus crisis has touched all of our lives, changing the way businesses operate and altering the tax calendar [itself](#). Firms everywhere are experiencing huge challenges, and not just those related to getting everyone on a Zoom call without a kiddo causing disruption or home wifi hitting the fritz. Small businesses are under threat right now, with uncertainty at an all-time high. In times like these, the right leadership can make all the difference.

When you get into a routine of business as usual, it's easy to rely on old-hat leadership tactics. A little affirmation here, a touch of directed feedback there, and you're all set. Well, we're no longer dealing with business as usual, and leadership styles need to change in kind. There's no playbook for dealing with how COVID-19 is changing the business landscape, so you'll need to look within, dig deep, and be the best leader you can be, both for your team members and your clients. I can't pretend to know all the answers, nobody can, but I can share some hard-won wisdom from dealing with previous tumultuous situations.

Be honest about what you know (and what you don't).

Right now, the goalposts move every day. We simply do not know when it will be safe to go back to normal. There will likely be a long period of trial and error before society settles into a normal rhythm again. That level of uncertainty isn't great when you're in a leadership role and people want answers. But the absolute worst thing you can do right now is pretend that uncertainty doesn't exist. "It's essential first to accept that perfection is impossible and the wrong thing to pursue," [says](#) Nihar Chhaya. "You will undoubtedly say one thing that will change the next day, and others may criticize you for it. But don't take it personally and don't worry about being right all the time."

If you are first honest about the fact you can't be certain, your team will be much more understanding about the variable nature of information. Business owners and those in leadership positions are masters of their domains, but only to an extent. In times like these, you know you can't [control](#) everything, and your team knows it too. There's no point in pretending otherwise.

Have hard conversations the right way.

You've probably already heard a [horror story](#) about a conference call or Zoom webinar that featured a mass layoff executed with cold, impersonal precision. Needless to say, you absolutely do not want to adopt this approach. No matter the

size of your firm, you should be willing to engage in frank, empathetic dialog, even if it's difficult to do so. Trying to evade responsibility or conversation is a recipe for disaster.

Obviously, nobody wants to furlough or lay off team members. However, that undesirable outcome is already a fact of life for many businesses. If it has to happen, it should be done with **compassion**. If keeping people on simply isn't an option, you should at least be upfront with departing team members, offering whatever help you can while acknowledging your remorse. Most of all, you have to try to complete the exercise in the most human way possible, even while following social-distancing measures. It may not be an easy task, but it's just the right thing to do.

Find a way to be positive

These are not easy times, but things will get better. On some days, you may have trouble believing that, but I promise you it's true. Remember to take time to focus on yourself, eat well, sleep, exercise, reflect, and find reasons to be joyful wherever you can. There's a lot to be fearful of and worried about with regards to the coronavirus, but there will be opportunity that comes from this important historical moment. We're all in it together, and it's up for leaders, in business and in all arenas of our life, to become our best selves.

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