

Leading and Managing During Times of Crisis

As uncertainty plagues our communities and the economy, strong and authentic leadership is crucial to finding our way through this crisis. Organizations need effective leaders at all levels to create a clear and inspiring vision, earn trust, and demonstrate compassion.

Having built an award-winning company that employed well over 100 people and built more than 5000 houses, I've given a lot of thought to leading and managing. The truth is- what it takes to lead now is no different than what it takes in more "normal" times.

Whatever the outside environment is, there are three requirements for effective leadership:

Vision

Without a vision to inspire others, leadership simply doesn't exist. Early in my career, I worked for a company whose slogan was "A New York Stock Exchange Company." Not "We build quality homes" or "We make great communities" - just a reference to the NYSE. Where's the vision?

When I think of leadership vision, I think of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous "I have a dream" speech. In this speech, King painted a picture of a future that anyone listening would want to be a part of, helping to build. That is a clear and inspiring vision.

This is what I had in mind when I started my company. Our vision statement was simple: "T.W. Lewis Company will become the best homebuilding organization in America as measured by product quality, customer satisfaction, and profitability." This was the vision that underpinned my leadership - a vision that expressed my dream, values, and personal journey - and it also inspired all of our employees.

Trustworthiness: Can I Trust You?

Think of someone you really admire and respect. My guess is that that person is trustworthy. They exhibit trustworthiness through both their intentions and their competence. They do what they say they will do. The same is true when it comes to leadership. Real leaders are trustworthy. They do what they say they will do.

One of the most recent examples of a "leader" who has failed in this department is Adam Neumann, WeWork's ousted CEO. From questions about his use of the company's funds to his inclusion of family members in the

business, numerous concerns were voiced about Neumann's trustworthiness. Ultimately, he was removed because his followers did not trust him.

Do You Care About Your Followers?

Leadership demands compassion - compassion for your employees and compassion for your customers. This means understanding and appreciating other people's points of view and demonstrating "compassion with action" - empathy, caring, and kindness for others.

While this is critical at all times, compassionate leadership is more important than ever at a challenging moment like this. Get into the details. Deal with individuals. Solve problems. Make exceptions to the rules, and do the right thing.

Lead And Manage

You also need to be a good manager. Through my long career, I've witnessed both successful and unsuccessful managers. My takeaway is that there are four fundamentals when it comes to management: planning, organizing, motivating, measuring. While leadership demands the above attributes, leadership alone is insufficient to keep your business going.

Planning

Whether you're in the C-Suite or are a middle manager, you need to plan before moving forward. That is, start with your vision and create concrete steps for working toward it.

Another way to be a better planner involves goal-setting. You won't achieve goals until you identify them and make a game plan for attaining them. I've learned it's best to set goals for different time frames: daily, monthly, annually. Daily goals are important because they emphasize the importance of today. Monthly and annual goals are good because they help you focus on what is really important versus urgent.

Once you know what the goals are, you can make a plan for reaching them. What do you have to do? What does your team need to do? What role does each of your direct reports play?

Organizing

When I was running my company, I was constantly looking at our organizational chart, asking myself if there was a better way to organize around our goals. Who is reporting to who? Do we have enough people working on X? Do we have too many people focused on Y?

Good management means a good organization of internal resources - both human and financial resources.

Motivating

Motivation is closely related to having a leadership vision. The best way to motivate your people is with an inspiring vision or a worthy ideal. If you're a supervisor, think of yourself as the leader of your three or five or fifteen direct reports. How can you express a vision that will motivate them to be the best that they can be?

Show you care. People respond to personal encouragement. They also want to know that you're listening to them and that you value and use their opinions.

Measuring

Without metrics acting as guardrails, you'll have no way of knowing if your processes and systems are working as planned. Regular measurement will show you when your goals have been accomplished and when you can move on. If you haven't met your metrics, you can then figure out what's not working and get things back on track.

At my company, we carefully measured customer satisfaction to a minute detail throughout the sales process. When we saw something customers weren't entirely happy with, we focused on it and figured out how to make it better.

Times may not be "normal," but effective leadership and management haven't changed. Now is the time to get back to basics and ensure that you're doing all you need to guide your team and your organization into a new future.

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