



CRITICAL LEADERSHIP REQUIRED

Post-Pandemic

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The American economy and that of other advanced nations is highly competitive, and in many

industries, there is little variation in the quality of the labor force or physical assets of competitors. What sets some great companies apart from their more mediocre rivals often boils down to the quality of an organization's leadership. This includes not only the CEO, but also the other C-suite executives and board of directors as well as the vice presidents, directors and managers who have smaller but important leadership roles.

Understandably, companies are eager to recruit and retain the best leaders in their fields to provide a competitive edge. But what makes a good leader and what critical leadership skills are most in need in today's economic environment?



Leadership Misconceptions

Let's start by addressing and dispelling a couple of persistent leadership myths.

Myth 1: Leaders are born, not made. This is an extremely common and extremely detrimental myth that pervades most people's ideas about leadership. While some people are certainly naturally gifted leaders, that's not to say that others can't work toward developing and honing key leadership skills. When organizations and their staffs take the leaders-are-born-not-made attitude, they're missing out on tremendous opportunities and potentially great leaders right under their noses.

Myth 2: Critical leadership skills are static and monolithic. In other words, pluck a great leader who has excelled in Situation A, place her in Situation B, and she'll almost certainly excel there as well. While some leadership skills may be more or less universally applicable—confidence, emotional intelligence, etc.—different situations often require different personalities and leadership styles.

Consider, for example, the fortunes of Sir Winston Churchill before, during and after World War II. After being forced out of prominence in the 1930s, the hawkish Churchill was summoned back from political exile when it became clear just how serious the threat from Nazi Germany was. After leading his nation through one of the greatest crises it had ever seen, Churchill was promptly ousted from the role of prime minister in 1945, the year Germany surrendered to the Allies. While Churchill was undeniably the right person for the job during wartime, he wasn't seen as the best choice in times of peace.

The same holds true for corporate leaders: sometimes a company needs an aggressive, risk-taking commander in chief at the helm; sometimes it needs a calm, steady hand to safely navigate troubled waters while maintaining the status quo.



Today's Critical Leadership Needs

We live in an extremely dynamic world, particularly when it comes to the national and global economies. If you were to tell a chief executive of a major company in 2018 that the world and the workplace would look dramatically different in four years, they probably wouldn't have been too surprised. But nobody expected the severity and nature of the changes that swept the globe during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Millions of people have died globally, and work life has been turned on its head with new health and safety requirements, a widespread shift to remote work and the correlated phenomenon known as the Great Resignation. The critical leadership skills pre-COVID are, therefore, not necessarily the critical leadership skills of today.

Communication Skills

With so many offices either remaining remote or trying out one of a myriad of hybrid models, traditional workplace communication has become more difficult just as it's become more important. Corporate leaders today are struggling to keep a geographically dispersed team on the same page and driving towards while also trying to support staff who are often emotionally strained and may even be dealing with unprecedented challenges and loss.



“Creating a space for open communication and prioritizing face-to-face conversations are crucial,” says Joyce Chan, COO of **Fountain**. “The pandemic shifted the way many people interact. Remote companies now rely on video conferencing to connect geographically diverse teams. The downfall of the remote workplace is that it is easy for employees to feel siloed, which is why it is essential that managers work to make employees feel valued and connected.”

Organization and Clarity

Relatedly, communication must be built off of a clear and well-organized corporate strategy and effective tactics to implement that strategy. As dynamic and fast-paced as the modern economy is, business leaders need to move fast, and it's very difficult to do that in any organization without being well-organized and clear in instructions to subordinates.

“A common scenario that most have experience or would agree with surrounds the idea that a message sent via text message has greater potential to be misinterpreted than if said face-to-face,” says Fred Walls of **Reputation Partners**. “The same is true for email and messaging at work. Given that many teams around the world are working remotely, much of our communication is coming in the form of



digital communication—text, Teams, Slack, etc.” It’s important, Walls says, “to maintain a sense of organization and clarity when communicating to your team members. One small miscommunication can have a domino effect on an entire project and impact productivity.”

Flexibility and Understanding

As alluded to above, millions of workers around the country have been significantly personally impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some have lost family members and other loved ones. Some have gotten severely ill. Some have had to deal with the added stresses of caring for loved ones or extra childcare duties due to school closures. Some might just miss spending time in-person with coworkers.

Leaders should be careful to understand the strain their teams have been under for over two years and be understanding and flexible when they can when it comes to remote work and time off requests, for example.

Employers should also be understanding of mistakes that get made in such unpredictable and chaotic situations and go easy on those guilty of such mistakes. Importantly, that means leaders should go easy on themselves for things they could have done better.

“Few leaders had a pandemic playbook at their fingertips when all this started,” says change-management expert Christine Andrukonis of **Notion Consulting**. “As a result, many may have messed up in their attempts to make life livable as the pandemic progressed and they were grasping for ‘normal.’ Perhaps not every idea shone as brightly as it should. Now is the time for acknowledgement and forgiveness. As leaders own their mistakes – with humility and authenticity – they will make strong connections with employees.”

In the modern economy, it’s people that drive competitive advantage, and leaders are some of the most important people in any organization. From a team lead all the way up to the CEO, leaders need to be empowered with the critical skills required to guide their organizations successfully.



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