

# LEADERSHIP FOR TODAY

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During the last few weeks, the United States and the nations around the world has taken on the challenge of fighting and managing what is now being called the silent enemy, the “COVID-19” pandemic.

HTS3 shared our first COVID-19 update a little over a month ago. I, too, must admit it seems like a lifetime ago! Now as today, April 5, 2020, the number of COVID-19 cases being reported has risen to a total of 336,958 cases in the United States with a total of 9,626 deaths being reported, with the majority of deaths occurring in the State of New York. Daily briefings indicate we have not reached the peak. With that being said, there will be tough days ahead for everyone! Many states have implemented “Stay at Home” orders for everyone in non-essential positions. Schools, restaurants, theaters, hotels, casinos, parks, golf courses, beaches and non-essential Businesses, etc. have been ordered to close and shut down. We have learned all types of new terms of such as: e.g. “Social Distancing”, “Slow the Curve” “Home-made Masks”, “Take-Out Ordering Only” and many other new terms for all of us and the general public to learn.

*Our thoughts and prayers go out to you, your patients, and to your local communities, but especially to our front-line healthcare workers that are enduring this pandemic each and every minute of every day; e.g. nurses, doctors, paramedics, police, respiratory therapists, EVS staff, and all support staff.*

## What Can Healthcare Leaders Do in Times of Crisis?

Staff look to their leaders to be up-front, present and engaged. Leaders must be prepared to communicate information and give updates often, to support and problem solve issues, to inspire and motivate, and to listen to the frontlines. Here are a few thoughts, ideas, and tips to help leaders be the best leader you can be, for you to best support your staff and colleagues during these dire times of crisis.

## BE Honest

Being authentic and honest are two of the most important qualities of a leader. Honesty is key in managing and communicating with staff, especially in times of a crisis. During a crisis, everybody looks to a leader for direction and for the next steps. Staff need to be reassured. If a leader projects fear and unease, that unease will translate to everyone. This is why it is absolutely necessary for leaders to remain confident and strong for the staff. Employees need to have leaders that they can rely on.

Leader Communications in Crisis Include:

- Communicate early, often, accurately, and openly
- Understand the full scope of the crisis, from the logistics, to how it is being managed and handled
- Explain complex issues simply, clearly, and concisely
- Develop a clear communications plan, containing specific actions, the rationale for these actions and progress being made

## BE Informed & Decisive

There are a few situations where leaders are supposed to make quick and/or hard decisions. Managing a major crisis is one of them. Leaders need to be able to make decisions quickly on the move, and in some cases, they will need to make some tough calls and perhaps very hard decisions. Making difficult decisions are the ones they know may not be popular to everyone and not going to win them any points, but they have to be made for the good of the organization as a whole. There is no time to dally or even ponder the pros and cons of a decision. Leaders who take action, who are decisive, and who are open to adapting their decisions to suit the needs of a situation are going to have more success in weathering the crisis compared to the leader who chooses to wait and not take action.

## STAY Engaged

One could say the real test of leadership does not occur when everything is operating smoothly. Rather, leadership is often tested during a major crisis like the COVID-19 Pandemic. How a leader behaves and acts during a crisis will establish their credibility as a good leader or a poor one. There's no handy manual that can guide or prepare a leader through very possible crisis scenario. This is because while there can be certain protocols in place that prevent a crisis from happening, each new crisis is unique, with its own problems and quirks and will require a different approach from the one used before. The COVID-19 Pandemic is an

example of having to adapt to daily changes in protocol as a result of CDC recommendations based upon supply and demand. COVID-19 has brought an unpredictable nature of crises meaning that leaders have had little to no time to prepare. It is the constant focus of managing the crisis on a minute-to-minute basis. In addition, we really do not know how long this COVID -19 crisis will last or go away.

## CALM the Chaos

In an immediate crisis, a work environment can very quickly move to chaos because of all the emotions running high, with stress and fear being at the forefront. It is imperative for a leader to take control and stop the panic from spreading. In fact, this is often the first thing a leader must do when news of a crisis breaks. This might involve quickly delegating tasks or simply bringing a room to order. Either way, it is only possible to begin a crisis action plan if everyone involved is focused and determined to complete the task on hand. Ask the staff what they may need from you. Typically, staff are seeking information, presence, and support.

### Leadership Behavioral Characteristics in Crisis Include Being:

- Level-headed, composed, and always visible to staff
- Rational, flexible, open-minded, and a good listener
- Confident, collaborative, and decisive
- Authentic and accountable
- Understands how people react to challenges, ambiguity, and loss
- Empathetic and supportive to the staff's needs and feelings while maintaining control of the situation
- Aware of the surroundings and is adept at managing complexity
- Trained in media relations and crisis management
- Engages appropriate stakeholders, including institutions and government agencies

## STAY Positive

This is one of those things that is easier said than done, especially when there are many unknown factors. Leaders must remain optimistic even when the outcome may appear otherwise. It is important for the leader to keep a game face on until the worst of the crisis has passed. This is because once insecurity finds a way, it may very quickly transform into self-doubt. And this can prevent leaders from making the hard choices that they have to. By communicating “we are in this together” and “we will get through this” brings folks



NEWSLETTER - APRIL 2020

together and strengthens the efforts being made. Acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of that is staff is making in a genuine way. Thank them often for their efforts.

## PRACTICE Self-Care

Leading in crisis can be very stressful and exhaustive as the hours and days go forward without resolve. Leaders must exercise self-care tactics (exercise, medication, hobbies, or reflections) and take care of themselves during these times. Carve out at least 15 minutes of the day without any interruptions to center and calm your thoughts.

## Conclusion

Even with all these tips and recommendations, it is impossible to be prepared for every crisis; especially with the scope of the crisis we have with COVID-19. The most important thing to remember is that all crises do eventually pass; N1H1, Ebola, SARS, etc. We get through them and move forward. When crisis occurs, tackle it head on, take ownership, acknowledge responsibility and perhaps use it as a stepping stone to enact change for a better future. We will get through this! We are all in this together! Be safe. Stay well. Thank You.

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