
LEADING YOUR TEAM IN TIMES OF CRISIS—PART 2

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Serve Your Team to Strengthen Your Business

You have successfully readied yourself to lead by keeping your threat response under control and focusing on what you can control. Now let's focus on equipping your team to succeed so that the business can thrive.

Now is a good time to remember what your team is—members of a species that has become the dominant animal on the planet by being highly social, collaborative and innovative. They are wired for a tribal existence; solitude and exclusion cause tremendous anxiety because the primitive brain believes it likely means death.

Today they not only fear for their and their loved ones' physical health and economic security, but they're also experiencing a solitude that is completely foreign and unsettling to most of them. Combat aviators and special warfare operators learn in POW training that few things break humans' morale more than prolonged isolation.

We're wired to come together in times of crisis, yet now we're asked to do the exact opposite. This is a perfect cocktail for ever-growing stress, but you, as their tribal leader, can make an enormous difference. Indeed, there's a good chance that what you do in the coming weeks and months will be what you are most remembered for long after profits and bonuses are forgotten.

A tribe looks to its leader for assurance, clarity and connection in times of crisis, so consider serving your tribe in three ways:

1. Stabilize your tribe

The best ways you can stabilize your tribe is to connect them, give them clarity and help them process what they are experiencing. To do so:

- Hold regular all-team video chats at least weekly. They need to see you and your body language as they always have. If you don't already have a technology solution, find one and use it. It can be awkward at first, but it is essential.
- Be honest and realistically optimistic. Help clarify the situation, explaining what you know to be true, what you don't know but will seek to find out, and what cannot be known. Everything is not going to be alright and they know it; saying so would harm your credibility. But most things probably will be alright. How much so will depend on how you and your team work together through this period. Express your confidence in them and the business and back it up with your reasons why.
- Demonstrate compassion. They are afraid. They are freaked out. They are completely isolated, or perhaps are overnight daycare workers or elementary schoolteachers. They aren't sure they can do it all but are unlikely to tell you, so ask about their concerns. If you're not hearing from someone, reach out to them. Offer to help them think through solutions, but first just play back to them what you're hearing. They don't expect you to solve all their problems, but they do expect their tribal chief to give a damn and listen. Only after exploring what's going on for them should you consider opening up about how you're feeling, so long as you can do so calmly and with a tone of optimism for the future. This isn't about turning anyone into your therapist, but about showing it's okay to be stressed and concerned today while being confident about winning in the future.

2. Focus your tribe

Just as the leader needs to focus, your team needs help regaining and maintaining focus in a crisis. Two things can help:

- Focus on what you have and can control. Just as the Apollo 13 mission commander said, "Stop telling me what we don't have and tell me what we do have," you need to take pause and acknowledge what is lost, but then focus on what you can control that can safeguard the team and enable them to succeed.
- Reground on purpose. Too many leaders take this powerful element for granted. *Why does our team exist? What would not happen if we ceased to exist? Who will benefit if we succeed? Who will suffer if we do not?* Focusing people back on why we're all here and what we are trying to accomplish together will provide powerful meaning for their work and a constructive distraction from the chaos they cannot control.

3. Strengthen your tribe

They are apart but they do not have to be alone. Help your team connect socially using video to help replace the informal daily connections they likely took for granted. The reason military units can work dispersed is not only shared ethos and mission but also familiarity; they know each other's families and lives outside of work, which helps foster trust. Turn this obstacle of working remotely into an asset to get to know each other better. Sometimes people at work seem to be avatars—professional projections of their real selves. At home, it's pretty real, warts and all. Meet each other's families, see each other's pets, talk to the toddler that videobombs the call, maybe even convene a joint birthday or pizza party. Not only can this strengthen bonds for a dispersed team, but it will likely also pay enduring dividends when we re-emerge to whatever the new normal is.

You're calm and focused. You've got *this*. You've served your tribe by stabilizing, focusing and strengthening them. *We've got this*. Now it's time to dial up your effectiveness working remotely as a team to fulfill your mission and serve your clients. That will be in our next installment.

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