



Leading Through COVID-19

LEADING THROUGH A CRISIS

We are in uncharted waters. Never before has our country faced a global pandemic of this magnitude. Our state and national leaders are changing the scope of this crisis on an hourly basis. We have, however, faced catastrophic situations in the past, such as 9/11, and were traumatized, isolated and unsure of what was next. Now is no different.

Who do we naturally turn to for guidance? Where do we look for answers, hope and inspiration? Our leaders. Many leaders are judged not on the crisis itself but on how the crisis is handled. So, how do you, as a leader, be the voice of calm to your staff, your board, your volunteers and your donors? How will you be remembered for handling the COVID-19 crisis? Leadership matters. People are watching closely, so you must lead by example.

“
Leadership matters. People are watching closely, so you must lead by example.”

What characteristics make effective leaders, especially in times of uncertainty?

To quote a famous British war poster from World War II, “*Keep calm and carry on.*”

Remaining **calm** is key. While the current situation is a crisis, you must calmly address crisis situations with facts, strategies and empathy to prevent unnecessary fear, panic and rumors. Listen, evaluate and react with a continuous sense of calm to reassure those around you as you move forward.

Great leaders are **purposeful and decisive**, having a clear sense of shared values and priorities. Stay close to your mission and goals to provide focus for moving forward. Be **authentic**,

honest and reliable, so staff, donors and key stakeholders can believe in you and trust your efforts. Sometimes, the most trustworthy answer is that you don't have all of the answers.

Great leaders are **confident and resilient**. Keep your eye on the long-term purpose and benefits of your work. A resilient, visionary leader can continuously articulate the direction of the organization and how to best move forward.

Be a great **communicator**. With rumors abounding, your listening, processing and communication skills are critical. When information is not forthcoming, people create their own stories, often falsely magnifying dire situations. Strategize and plan your communication approach with fellow executives, making sure you have the most up-to-date information to share internally and externally. Involve your team to create effective solutions that help mitigate uncertainty. Involving them in strategy empowers them and gives them a sense of control in uncertain times.

Donors, prospects, board members and volunteers also want to hear from you as their philanthropic leader. Keep them informed of your hospital's preparedness and responsiveness to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) to ease fear. Many are searching for ways to help, and you can connect them to your organization's needs. Use this opportunity to relay the importance of philanthropy during a crisis and how impactful their contributions can be to support your immediate efforts. Take advantage of email, social media and even hand-written notes to keep stakeholders connected and involved.

Respected leaders show **empathy and compassion**. Take time to listen to your team.

Empathize with them. Show your appreciation of them. Understand the extenuating circumstances they may be experiencing. Most are working remotely to lower risk and exposure. They may also have the added responsibilities of children home from school. Emotions are likely running high, so help them feel safe and supported.

Leading your organization through a crisis provides an opportunity to demonstrate your worth as a health care executive leader who also happens to lead the philanthropy efforts, rather than the other way around. Be a collaborative partner who exhibits constant discretionary effort and input. Be part of the solution.

The most compelling way to exemplify extraordinary leadership during a crisis is to lead by example and to be a superior role model. Those around you need to:

- believe in you as a leader
- believe in your passion
- trust you are informed and honest
- know you are decisive and willing to make decisions
- know lines of communication are open

All crises eventually pass. However, how you react as a leader in crisis could be the legacy you leave behind. How will you be remembered for handling the coronavirus crisis?

About the Author: Lori Counts is a Principal Consultant and Certified Executive Coach with Accordant. You can reach her at Lori@AccordantHealth.com.