



Leading Through **COVID-19**

LEADING THROUGH UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

As health care philanthropy leaders, many of us now find ourselves sitting on the sidelines as our world is crashing around us. For the first time, we are leading and motivating our teams remotely—dealing with feelings of isolation and more. We desperately want to help our hospitals any way we can. Many of us are having a difficult time dealing with the stress, anxiety and even depression as a result of COVID-19 coupled with the fear of economic instability. We are reassuring team members who fear they will lose their jobs and worrying about the health and well-being of families and friends.

Yet, only a few weeks ago, our world felt normal. As leaders, we had the answers within our realm of responsibility. We had developed our philanthropy plan and knew it synced with our health system's strategic plan. We knew the path forward. Simply stated, we felt in control.

In this health care crisis, we know we are behind the curve. Our stress comes from knowing that we can help—but we are not sure how—combined with the uncertainty of if and when life and work will return to normal.

Today, we're swimming upstream, barely treading water. In some cases, we are told to hunker down and wait. In other situations, we are told not to communicate with donors unless scripted by the system's communications team, leaving us to feel marginalized. In this health care crisis, we know we are behind the curve. Our stress comes from knowing that we can help—but we are not sure how—combined with the uncertainty of if and when life and work will return to normal.

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There is, however, hope and opportunity. This is the time to demonstrate our true value as health leaders. Let's embrace this uncertainty and rise up. Transitioning from a philanthropy leader working in health care to a strategic, innovative and forward-thinking health care executive, also skilled in philanthropy, allows our CEOs to see us differently. We can shift the paradigm and be part of the solution, exercising strong executive presence from a place of clarity and conviction. We must be the calm amidst the chaos. Executive leadership involves guiding people through risk and change. We can't be deterred.

As philanthropy executives, we understand the importance of relationship building and the power of effective communication. We are influencers who drive the foundation forward. Using our abilities to inspire others can move us to a higher level of leadership by exhibiting discretionary effort in and for the C-suite. Here are a few ways we can step up:

- Coordinate with materials management or supply chain services to discover new ways to engage the community on donations of personal protective equipment and more.
- Ensure the foundation is helping to educate and provide gift-in-kind donation forms for receipting and acknowledging gifts from the community.
- Determine if there are restricted or unrestricted dollars that can be utilized right now to help bridge gaps. Utilize those rainy-day funds, because it's storming right now!

- Establish a COVID-19 Fund.
- Empower our teams to create ideas to solve shortages that exist at the hospital.
- Revise the plan. Taking the initiative to postpone upcoming events for when the timing might be better is often needed.
- Focus on stewardship and check in with donors to see how they are doing.

Health care executives must adapt quickly and make tough decisions when necessary. Great leaders lead with transparency, authenticity, humility and consistency. We stay the course even through the enormous disruptive changes going on around us. Adaptive leaders lead collaboratively, offering innovative solutions to address, redirect or drive change.

Robert E. Quinn, author of *Deep Change* states, "Most of us build our identity around our knowledge and frame of reference. Making a deep change involves abandoning both and 'walking naked into the land of uncertainty.'" He continues, "This tortuous journey requires that we leave our comfort zone and step outside our normal roles. In doing so, we learn the paradoxical lesson that we can change the world only by changing ourselves."

Let's change our mindsets and demonstrate our worth as strong, confident and accomplished health care leaders. We do not have to be relegated to the sidelines. We must adapt to the ever-changing crises before us and be relevant.

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