



Leading Through COVID-19

# EMBRACING ONGOING CHANGE AND TRANSITION

No doubt about it. Our world has changed. For months, this pandemic has dominated the news, our economy and our lives. Even with restrictions being lifted in some areas, we still don't know how long the impacts and changes will continue and if there will be another surge of COVID-19. Our lives still feel beyond our control. People are frustrated and sometimes non-compliant with preventive measures because they are "over it," wanting back life as they knew it.

While we are accustomed to experiencing momentous change in single doses, such as dealing with a new boss or a different job, this is different. We are still adjusting to multiple

challenges like working from home while schooling our children, coping with layoffs and furloughs and trying to lead our teams remotely while helping our health care systems as philanthropy leaders. Many of us are left wondering if we will soon return to an office while having children home from school. How will that impact exposure and risk? It's exhausting and overwhelming—physically, emotionally and financially.

As William Bridges describes in his book, *Managing Transitions*, "It is not the change that does you in. It's the transitions."<sup>1</sup> We are certainly in quite the transition phase at home and at work. How, as leaders, can we push through and beyond this transition?

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It is often in the transitions that we learn to best address the changes around us. Today, many describe themselves as feeling in limbo and overcome by uncertainty. We are in a psychological transition phase while coming to terms with our situation. We are lost in this neutral zone

between our old existence and our new reality, both personally and professionally. We question our roles and what we should do next.

As health care philanthropy executives, we must rise up to lead through this change and help those around us work through this transition phase. Recognize that everyone accepts change at a different pace. Let's address those things within our control. Stay in the present and create boundaries, remembering to pause, focus and stay balanced.

As health care philanthropy leaders pushing beyond COVID-19, we must ask ourselves:

- How has the pandemic affected our foundation?
- What changes or innovations must we make to stay relevant and purposeful?
- What positive outcomes can be achieved right now?
- What does success look like in three months? Six months? Next year?
- What are our biggest challenges and risks?
- How can we mitigate those risks?
- What are our highest priorities? How have they changed?
- What messages do we need to communicate to demonstrate confidence and clarity for the future of our foundation?
- How can I make the team's possible transition back into the building go safely and smoothly?

From this information, produce an action plan to lead the team beyond these unsettling times. Creating and implementing a plan settles the anxiety of feeling out of control, moves our teams from our present situation to the future and creates optimism. What innovative ideas can be brought forward to adapt to this new situation? Think differently. Necessity forces organizations to innovate.

Once an action plan is developed, lead others through the transition of change. Considering the acronym "CHANGES" will help tremendously as you focus on your next steps. While many of these may already be underway, let's remember to:

- C**ommunicate constantly through the change.
- H**elp others to understand the need and reason for the change.
- A**cknowledge what is being lost.
- N**avigate through the signs of change. There can actually be a grieving process.
- G**ive others time to process.
- E**nsure respect for the past.
- S**how how the ending contributes to the new beginning. Lead forward with hope and optimism.

Plato once said, "Necessity is the mother of invention." Entrepreneurs know that some of the best ideas have been born out of the most challenging times. Americans are well known for their ingenuity. Businesses are adapting their models to help with COVID-19, from making masks to volunteering time.

Great leaders have the astounding ability to accept problems before them as challenges. They are not deterred by obstacles in their paths. How will you adapt and change? What innovative thinking can you implement to work through and beyond transition and change?

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<sup>1</sup> William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, Perseus Books, 2009.