



Leading Through COVID-19

STRENGTHENING CULTURE IN COVID-19 RECOVERY: ONE HABIT AT A TIME

For health care leaders, the escalated need to be future-focused is dramatically restrained by uncertainty and financial threats facing their organizations. Some refer to this current state as a challenging VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) environment, with the immediate need to lead in situations that few were prepared for or have experienced. The best way to ensure your institution not only survives but also thrives in a COVID-19 recovery is through Breakthrough Leadership, as described by Accordant CEO, Betsy Chapin Taylor, FAHP, *“Breakthrough Leadership is the ability to turn the crisis into a catalyst for positive change, to uncover new opportunities within the chaos and to address evolving needs while simultaneously crafting a destination for the future.”*

Breakthrough Leadership also requires an understanding of your own biological need to survive and of how the human brain responds to VUCA as a threat to your basic survival instincts.

“We cannot become what we want by remaining what we are.”

MAX DEGREE

Under a threat response, blood flow decreases from the brain’s prefrontal cortex—the place of executive function, thinking and planning—just when you most need these resources! Organizational threats often result in implementing what has worked in the past. Further, as we seek to recover from COVID-19, and as noted in the July/August 2020 issue of *Harvard Business Review*, there are no past comparisons or analogies to envision the future.¹

Consider how your inner drive and intellectual nature of your past leadership decisions brought rise to successful outcomes, accomplishments and industry advancements. Those successes were based on a vision of the future and a mindset that worked well. Being future-focused leaders NOW is not only difficult but also can be one of the biggest challenges of your career.

Being future-focused requires acknowledging how significantly changed you and your employees are

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as a result of the heightened financial, social, mental and emotional threats. At a fundamental level, there is a deep yearning for a greater sense of purpose. Seeking greater purpose requires you to recognize how past thinking (mindsets) and behaviors will not support your survival or serve you, your employees and the organization well in the future.

Questions remain and they demand answers:

- How do you create a more purposeful, values-based culture that supports the healing and well-being needs of your employees and ensures a thriving destiny for your institution?
- What is required to expand your capacity and be the catalyst for change?
- How can you design a culture attuned to the healing and most humanistic needs of your “human capital,” while creating greater resilience and even post-traumatic growth?
- How do you emerge better, stronger and more positive while inspiring and energizing your employees?

The answer—HABITS!

Creating a new, healthier and thriving culture is about changing habits. Just a short time ago, bad habits and less-desirable behaviors were tolerated for a variety of reasons. As long as metrics and year-end goals were met, status quo culture allowed the intolerable.

Increasingly, organizations that continue to tolerate these undesirable habits of the past find themselves struggling to achieve post-pandemic success. Just as it’s difficult to envision the future, it is neurologically almost impossible to deconstruct undesirable (now hard-wired) habits and better to construct new habits for a more positive culture.

It’s been said culture manifests itself by the way you and your employees speak and interact with each other. Creating new habits acknowledges the need for new language and interactions to heal and

re-energize the workforce. These new habits must be rooted in values of gratitude, purpose and trust. Leaders can shape the new culture based on these shared values and by accepting the new learnings and vulnerability that must be embraced.

New habits will be the catalyst for positive change, allow for new ways of thinking to uncover new opportunities within the chaos and address evolving needs. Most importantly, these new values-based habits will simultaneously craft a new destination for the future.

As you envision how a future-focused, healthy, positive and purposeful culture looks, consider these steps:

- 1 Identify the “at our best” culture based on your values and strengths as a leader, as well as those of your employees and your organization.
- 2 Identify the associated behaviors and necessary upskilling to strengthen how employees understand their roles and purpose in transforming culture.
- 3 Identify leadership actions and responses to continually reinforce the new values-based habits, making both major and minor course corrections as needed.

Your culture will define the future—the future energy, innovation and purposeful pursuit of a healthier institution and community.

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¹ <https://hbr.org/2020/07/emerging-from-the-crisis#learning-from-the-future>