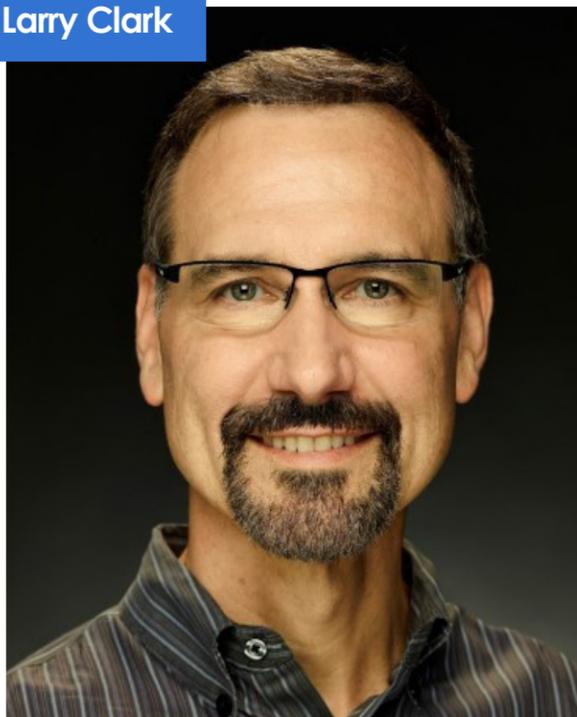


# How Covid-19 has REDEFINED LEADERSHIP

Be prepared to shake up your leadership practices in the new world of work.

Larry Clark



and unpredictable human emotion is directly tied to your personal capacity and state of being.

Leaders can be the model for self-care for their teams by first creating a sense of balance for themselves. For example, schedule time for workouts, a bike ride with the kids, or movie night. Additionally, with many people still expecting to work from home at least part of the time, leaders can establish new rituals and rhythms in the day and week that promote balance. For example, they can schedule time to step away from their computers, begin and end the day with specific “transition” tasks, and even designate different spaces in the home for work and non-work activities. Even committing to an hour without picking up a mobile device at the end of the workday can be restorative. These types of activities can take the important role of transition that used to be built into a morning or evening commute.

In the absence of traditional vacations, leaders could take “vacations” as time to focus on family time, caregiving and self-care. This pause will allow leaders to take a breather and leaves them feeling refreshed and clearheaded once they return, leading to greater productivity and well-being.

## Communicate consistently and authentically

Between prioritizing the health of employees and making decisions on pay cuts or layoffs, employee well-being has come to the forefront for managers and will continue to be the focus until a vaccine is found. As we enter the phase of office re-openings and trying to cultivate a sense of normalcy, it will be up to leaders to make their employees feel like they remain the number one priority. They want leaders to prioritize their physical, emotional, and mental well-being. For leaders, this means leading with transparency and honesty in order to uphold workforce morale at a time when employees are worried about their jobs, their own health, and the health of their friends and family. It is essential that leaders remain in consistent

contact with employees through new and more regular means of communication. Virtual meetings, group Slack channels, answering employee questions posed on bulletin boards, or having small group discussions are all ways to get that done.

Another tactic is setting a recurring meeting with senior leaders where employees receive updates on the company’s plans and business performance. Having these meetings on the calendar, where leaders can be personal and authentic, will help ease employee anxiety and make them feel like the company is putting them first.

This kind of honesty and authenticity goes a long way towards fostering trust among both parties and creates a sense of collectiveness that is essential during times of crisis. It also helps employees feel a stronger connection to the company, as research shows that employees who receive regular updates from their companies have more positive views of their employers and are more likely to be proud to work for their companies (55%).

## See your people

Similarly, the coronavirus crisis has demonstrated the need for empathy among leaders. In times of crisis, often the most important factors affecting an individual and their performance are completely invisible to a leader. So empathy doesn’t start with building an emotional connection – it starts with really seeing your people and their unique situation through their eyes. It means asking questions, creating space for people to talk, and letting people know – through words and actions – that you heard them. Leaders will shoulder much of the responsibility for ensuring a smooth return to the workplace, so they must acknowledge the numerous ways the everyday lives of employees have been impacted and how they continue to change, while also helping to address them. For example, an employee with school-age children at home might be concerned about juggling their needs with those of their job. An empathetic leader will work with that employee to show that they understand their concerns and create a situation where that employee can flex their work hours in order to better manage their responsibilities.

Leaders will also need to take greater responsibility for the well-being of their employees. We know that not every leader is what you might call a “people” person, but every leader can create more time during their days to check-in with employees and help with real-time problems that arise as they transition back to the office.

By connecting on a personal level, leaders can help their employees develop an understanding of each person’s work context so they can be more sensitive to each other’s constraints, now

and in the future.

## Be flexible

The coronavirus crisis has caused leaders across the world to answer to its whims. No one can predict what will happen next, so leaders are forced to make decisions on a daily, sometimes hourly, basis. As a result, it is expected that leaders become ambidextrous, and more adept at making decisions under pressure.

To help leaders navigate the next phases of the coronavirus crisis and for any future crises that might emerge, L&D teams must prepare them to be agile, resilient, and adaptive. They must prepare them to pivot as needed and adapt as new information comes in as they identify what’s working and what’s not working. For example, doctors at Mt. Sinai in New York City used skills they developed through a leadership development program we developed in partnership with them to work on the frontlines of the coronavirus crisis. These doctors used their new learning in how to be adaptive in the face of volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous times to shift from their usual areas of practice to serve in the Covid-19 ICU, learning adult care on the fly, and figuring out how to direct teams of people they had never worked with before. In training employees to be adaptable, they will be more prepared to make difficult decisions and come up with creative solutions to get to a desired outcome.

In a knowledge worker environment, this flexibility extends to remote work. Stay-in-place orders showed that permanent remote work on a variety of schedules is possible, and in some cases, more productive. For those industries where it is possible, leaders can offer employees the continued flexibility of remote work, to help ease the anxiety that some might be facing as the “return to work” phase begins, and will also help build a leader’s reputation as being understanding to the needs of their employees.

The world will look radically different as a result of the coronavirus crisis. While it is important for leaders to apply the lessons they’ve learned during the pandemic moving forward, it is also important that they remember the key attributes in being a good leader: driving performance and preparing for the future. Perhaps what we all have learned is that there is more than one way to get that done. ■

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In times of crisis, leaders are more intrinsically motivated to be visible, with a heightened sense of responsibility and ownership to properly shepherd their employees through hard times. This fact could not be truer than it is right now, as leadership boundaries have been stretched seemingly overnight by the coronavirus crisis. While the coronavirus crisis will not last forever, it has led to many valuable lessons that leaders can use to be stronger in the future.

## Start with yourself

In a time where empathy, listening and connecting with people is the mantra (and we’ll get to all that), a leader’s first order of business is to get their own self together. People know when their manager’s tank is empty, and your ability to read the temperature of your team, be present and deal with the pressure of business