

Leadership in a Two-Dimensional World

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Having been in the business world for over 40 years now and having experienced several (let's not count!) economic and stock market upheavals, a quote often attributed to Mark Twain (aka Samuel Clemens) comes to mind: ***"History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes"***.

A lot has been and will be said about our current economic predicament and how it's different and like the 2008/2009 Great Recession or potentially as some have already expounded, the Great Depression. I will leave that to the economists who will of course be perfectly accurate only in hindsight. . . like last time.

What is certainly different this time is how we are able to connect as families, businesses, communities and society. I am so grateful for the fact that we can zoom from meeting to meeting, execute flawlessly from home, connect with our co-workers, parents, children, grandchildren and friends. My daughter, with five children and a husband at home right now, even had a mini-high school reunion over Zoom. Would she or could she have found the time to figure that out before today? This may become the standard for the future. The fact is, and

I hate to admit it, I am not sure how well Brightworth could have pulled the last 4 weeks off in 2008/2009 without some significant bumps which we were able to avoid this time because of technology and our preparedness as a team.

As leaders, we need to recognize the apparent differences our current situation brings to bear, and it comes in several dimensions. Let me start with several observations:

1. Connecting in two dimensions (flat screens) is not the same thing as in three dimensions.
2. Under stress we all start to exhibit what are called stress behaviors and stress can and will erode mental abilities and make us less emotionally intelligent.
3. Working from home is not for everyone which will add more stress for some than others.
4. After what feels like 4 weeks of solitary confinement (which by the way, it's NOT!), all the above become more pronounced.

Why is it that some teams rise above the rest in times of turmoil, regardless of the challenges? Somehow, they can build trust between themselves and can continue to win over clients and their clients' fears, building life-long customer appreciation? They keep their productivity high and are even gaining more clients in the process! In other words, how is it that they are capable of adapting?

The answer lies in an organization's cultural resonance, leadership that adjusts its style based on the needs of their team and understanding choice.

Adapting to Stress and Working from Home

Academic research on remote productivity is mixed. Some studies suggest that productivity declines while others suggest increases. The data in a recent Harvard Business School Article: "How to Keep Your Team Motivated, Remotely," by Lindsay McGregor and Neel Doshi provide some interesting insights. The article suggests that success depends on how you do it. What that means, and it's important to note, that right now, many companies risk a reduction in their employees' motivation because they are forced to work from home. Granted, not by choice.

The HBR article goes on to state (emphasis mine)¹:

"Between 2010 and 2015, we surveyed more than 20,000 workers around the world, analyzed more than 50 major companies, and conducted scores of experiments to figure out what motivates people, including how much working from home plays into the equation.

When we measured the total motivation of people who worked from home versus the office, we found that working from home was less motivating. Even worse, when people had no choice in where they worked, the differences were enormous."

Interesting that just having a choice made the biggest difference. The study elaborates that people who *could choose* to work from home, regardless of their decision, were more productive than people who had *no choice* but to work at the workplace! Just knowing they had a choice makes all the difference. It's about having the autonomy to work and meet the organizations' agendas the best way they know how. The word that comes to mind is empowerment. Recognizing that right now, many people are not happy because, while they are finally getting to work from home for the first extended period-of-time, it's not by choice nor

under the terms they would want.

Creating and Maintaining Organizational Resonance

Resonance: (Oxford English Dictionary) refers to “the reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection,” or, more specifically, “by synchronous vibration.” The relationship equivalent occurs when two or more people (think organizationally) are on the same wavelength emotionally, regarding purpose and common goals. They feel “in sync.” And true to its meaning, that synchrony “resounds,” prolonging the positive emotional pitch.

What I have noticed over the first four weeks of shelter in place, is that my ability to feel and impact the resonance of our organization is somewhat hampered by our two-dimensional screen which we are relating through. Are my behaviors on screen the same as when I am in person? Do I pay attention at the same level and make eye contact? Am I communicating the same level of empathy? It may be an issue of my personal leadership style, but I am willing to bet that it’s true for many organizational leaders right now. This requires me to make changes in how I communicate and the level of intentionality I need to display while also making sure we execute our strategy and serve clients.

As leaders of our organizations, departments and teams, the most powerful tool in our toolbelt right now that helps us build resonance is being emotional; and being more intentionally emotional. That’s right. Many leaders, when under pressure will default to thinking, focus on execution, maybe even micromanage under the guise of what is the “smart thing to do”. As Albert Einstein said: *“We should take care not to make the intellect our god. It has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality. It cannot lead, it can only serve.”*

In general, the more emotionally demanding the work, the more empathic and supportive leaders across the organization need to be. The greater a leader’s skill at transmitting emotions, the more forcefully the emotions will spread. How well we can communicate and direct our positive emotions and feelings, to help our team and employees, lays in the mood and tone with which we deliver our message.

Leadership Style Intentionality

If you have never read Daniel Goleman’s *Primal Leadership*, you will want to if this article is resonating with you. In his book he describes six leadership styles and when and how they can build resonance and when to use them. As we experience stress across our organizations it’s important for key leadership to flex their leadership muscles across these styles and not just their natural styles.

The first four styles—visionary, coaching, affiliative, and democratic—create the kind of resonance that boosts performance and reduce stress, while two others—pacesetting and commanding—are useful only in some very specific situations. In other words, use with caution.

Let’s take a brief look at each of these styles².

- **Visionary Style**

How it builds resonance: Moves people toward shared dreams?

Impact on climate: ***Most strongly positive*** ?

When is it appropriate: When changes require a new vision, or when a clear vision is needed

- **Coaching Style**

How it builds resonance: Connects what a person wants with the organization's goals?

Impact on climate: ***Highly positive*** ?

When is it appropriate: To help an employee improve performance by building long-term capabilities

- **Affiliative Style?**

How it builds resonance: Creates harmony by connecting people to each other ?

Impact on climate: ***Positive***

When is it appropriate: To heal rifts in a team, motivate during stressful times, or strengthen connections. ?

- **Democratic Style**

How it builds resonance: Values people's input and gets commitment through participation ?

Impact on climate: ***Positive*** ?

When is it appropriate: To build buy-in or consensus, or to get valuable input from employees ?

- **Pacesetting Style**

How it builds resonance: Meets challenging and exciting goals ?

Impact on climate: Frequently poorly executed, ***often highly negative*** ?

When is it appropriate: To get high-quality results from a motivated and competent team?

- **Commanding Style?**

How it builds resonance: Soothes fears by giving clear direction in an emergency ?

Impact on climate: ?Often misused, ***highly negative***

When is it appropriate: In a crisis, to kick-start a turnaround, or with problem employees

As we enter the coming weeks, consider how your preferred and natural style needs to be

either ramped up, enhanced by using other styles for specific teams or team members, or maybe you need to abandon your style all together because you are not getting the results you want. It takes a lot of intentionality to exercise leadership styles that we don't naturally display. Working on and mastering that capability is a lifelong pursuit.

Have more questions about leadership in a two-dimensional world? [Click here](#) [1]

1. Source: How to Keep Your Team Motivated, Remotely'

Lindsay McGregor and Neel Doshi

April 09, 2020

https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-keep-your-team-motivated-remotely?utm_med... [2]

2. Source: Primal Leadership

Daniel Goleman

Annie McKee

Richard Boyatzis

August 2013

Continue reading ? [3]

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