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What leadership qualities do we need right now?

Written by [Lara Morgan](#) on Wednesday, 15 July 2020. Posted in [Leadership](#), [People](#)

In this extraordinary 'time out of time', the CEO's role needs to be more pivotal and flexible than ever.

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In this extraordinary 'time out of time', the CEO's role needs to be more pivotal and flexible than ever. And it is not easy – CEO's have to change persona from Growth CEO to Survival CEO and it won't suit everyone. Winston Churchill was great at survival during WW11, but in peace time one could argue he was not the best candidate for Prime Minister. Based on ghSMART's 10 year study called The CEO Genome Project, a ten year study, set out to identify key attributes that differentiate high-performing CEOs came up with some useful markers that are more than relevant today - speed of decision making, the ability to ruthlessly prioritise, the ability to engage with the team and take them on the journey with them, the need to always, always keep an eye on the cash and protect it and, lastly, still keep a growth mindset. My experience gained through my first business as we worked through Sars, Foot and Mouth and Osama raining on our parade have given me valuable lessons learnt which I am happy to share.

Calm, cool crises management

This should be led by the CEO across all operations, all of the time, with military precision. Relentlessly focusing on goals and ensuring the company's values are communicated well, never forgetting the DNA of the company. Culture and customer obsession should be fed through everything and execution is key. I was reminded recently that an 'A' Class Execution and 'B' Class Strategy WINS every time over an 'A' Class Strategy and a 'B' Class Execution. It is tough and my advice is get your diary organised.



Tweets by @elitebizma



Communicating through cyberspace. Former television broadcaster Arti Halai chats to management coaching company Vistage about the differences between connecting with an audience online and meeting them face-to-face. ow.ly/LHtG50AxDJh - bit.ly/32swVFx



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Never underestimate what is going to change

Feedback from the past 100 days suggests that a very high percentage of employees would prefer to continue to work from home. My advice is to embrace this change. It has always been a positive practice in my companies and investments and, thanks to employee trust, I have found that the many benefits for most, but certainly not all, jobs certainly outweigh the negatives. Undoubtedly meeting places and spaces will change dramatically whilst we will adjust to new travel and business habits and I hope these changes will be for the good of all. Invest in fully flexible working for your team and you will find that the trust bond results in increased productivity, as well as improved employee engagement. The knock effects of zero rat race and no commute will channel a boost in employee mental health and well-being and contribute positivity to their lifestyle .

Zoom calls and video calls are super important in creating a connection with both potential and current clients. This relationship is built on trust as they let you see into their homes and meet their kids. The sales conversion via Zoom is higher than standard phone calls. CEO's should lead on this and be comfortable with the uncomfortable. Show you do not mind, never cringe, when a demanding child enters a call. Instead engage and grow closer with your customers and your team.

Cash is king

The Finance Director or Controller should be the CEO's new Best Friend. The CEO needs to rally, motivate and be pillar of strength during tough times as decisions are quickly made as to what can be done to bring cash forward. It is what gets measured that really matters and however bad it gets, the CEO has to be infectious with positivity and smart with what's the right path.

As the migration to remote working becomes a long-term shift pattern, can this free up cash in the company? Do you need the overheads of offices, rent and business rates? Now is the time to look to take advantage of Government help. It is very easy to get cheap finance right now so take advantage of it.

Question everything

Now is the time question everything as you create your new strategy for the new reality. Consider what does a fully flexible company look like? How can you reduce complexity and costs to serve? What has this experience taught you that your company can live without?

How might you strengthen your customer relationships? One of my companies, Scentered.com, sent care packages to stores that stayed open selling their products during the tough times. This was so appreciated and so well received and definitely strengthened our customer bond. Look at how you can tailor your marketing messages to the pain points of customers? If your customers are retailers, ask yourself how they can sell your product better in the new environment? Is no touch an issue? How can you help them overcome it?

How brilliant is the customer journey? Have you invested in digital and trialled your own company digital journey yourself? Are you prioritising the right products? What can you do to make both your staff and your customers feel you care? Gate8 have introduced hygiene kits for staff returning from work and Scentered have started making 500ml bottles with a cleverly designed 2 side bottle label for those who do or don't want a clinical look. And never forget the competition. Ask yourself how might you embrace new sales channels and dust off your digital ambitions? What are the key trends outside your sector that can guide key investments?

Optimise team performance and morale

The CEO who encourages the team to adopt power giving routines is on to a winner and leading by example is definitely the way forward.

Exercise: First thing in the morning will create a 12 hour mood boost- what a brilliant way to start the day. Research shows the effects are the equivalent to taking an anti-depressant. Also find ways to encourage time out of the chair. Aches and pains caused by the home work environment need to be thought about and supported. Many companies have gifted our Yogi Bare products in lock down to employees to encourage stretch with acupressure to aid relaxation.

Over communicate to show how much you care: Monday Commitments (Top 3 Things we are working on) and Friday Wins help motivate and keep the team together. Daily Huddles on Zoom – just 10 mins for a coffee break can gift a moment of sanity.

Create a Digital Sunset: this should be at least 1 hour before sleep, otherwise productivity and good sleep will suffer.

Drive expectations to deliver results

I am encouraging my team to each open and communicate with a new prospect every day – this is our business as usual. This is best done by the Single Task Focus as multi-tasking results in a 27% loss of productivity

daily. Love that list and maximise value and expectancy, minimise impulsivity and delay. Remind yourself “Fear is a Reaction; Courage is a decision.”

And finally

Be your most courageous self and choose to take the right bold actions. If you act on the difficult conversations - quickly, with humility, face to face - you will be better placed to employ someone back sooner having acted faster. I am already doing this and I love it.

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About the Author



Lara Morgan

Lara has been a finalist in Ernst Young Entrepreneur of The Year Award three times and a finalist in the Veuve Clicquot Business Woman of the Year Award. In 2009 Lara received the much-coveted Cranfield University Entrepreneur Alumna Award. She is a published author of the Amazon best-selling business book “More Balls Than Most” and is a co-founder of Start Up Britain. Taking all this in her stride, she also trains for charity bike rides and triathlon and came 10th in the 2011 World Triathlon Championships in Beijing.

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