

“How Long Will It Last?” – Being a Leader Through COVID-19

Apr 8, 2020 – *Juliette Dennett (Managing Director, Dale Carnegie Northern England)*

Returning early from holiday in Mexico to help steer our business through this crisis, we found ourselves in a chaos manifesting itself in a ludicrous shortage of toilet rolls and a debate on the validity of face masks. In business terms we were initially in a period of shock and awe. Overnight, good decisions could become bad ones and vice versa. Now, with just a nano-second to reflect and observe, these 5 leadership beliefs seem worth holding on to if we're to be in good shape on the other side of Covid-19.

Act when it feels too early (otherwise it's too late)

Early on I watched leaders I admire take decisions to crisis-proof their business and their people, and I worried that they were acting out of fear and panic – because some of these decisions seemed too early. Now it's clear they were good decisions at the right time. Let's make sure a spirit of optimistic positivity is rooted in the reality of where we are.

People first

Confronting where we are today can be emotional and it's no exaggeration to describe some of the lows as moments of grief and loss. As leaders we have to be (digitally) shoulder-to-shoulder with people as they work through their sadness and worry, to allow them to heal and build resilience. Only then will they progress to be agile and creative in the new world we are faced with.

The “What” and the “How”

The “Why” for our business activities may not have changed, and the “Who” we do it for may be the same. The “What” and the “How” will almost certainly be different. Our leadership needs to quickly grapple with the changes and define new structure and process. Organisations that can quickly pivot to reflect the new normal will have the strongest chance of success.

Concrete decisions

Our teams' world of work may have turned upside down and individuals may struggle to deal with the uncertainty of what's happening, so they crave leadership that provides clear and concrete decisions that give clarity on expectations and required actions.



Three years from now?

Business survival through a crisis undoubtedly requires urgent changes in strategy and immediacy of action. At the same time we must also lift our eyes to the horizon and visualise a reshaped world and transformed conditions in which our business must flourish. The visionary leaders who make the right call now in the organisational changes they prescribe will have businesses that survive and thrive for the long haul.

How long will it last? The measures to curtail Covid-19 might last a few weeks, the economic impact several months or more, but the transformation in our work and our lives will be far more enduring. Our leadership footprint will be defined by our capacity for compassion, our judgement in decision-making and by our vision for a world beyond the virus.