



Uncharted territory

Providing leadership through turbulent changes is a challenge

BY JERRY OLSON

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has affected each of us differently, but one thing we can all agree on is that business as we knew it has forever changed.

As leaders, we must be flexible to these changes. Does your leadership style allow for that? Are your skills keeping up? Keep those questions in mind as we look at just a few of the ways business has changed in the last year.

Workspace

Workspaces have changed significantly. “Work from home” (WFH) and “work from anywhere” (WFA) are the norm, not the exception. Even businesses that work primarily in the field and at clients’ sites have seen changes.

Cramming 20 people into your office lobby for the morning circus no longer works. Meetings with clients and prospects at their kitchen table is no longer the accepted norm.

Thankfully, great video tools are now readily available to make client meetings still possible. One-on-one meetings with your team members can happen on video calls. And, after a few frustrating months, it seems as if most of us are getting close to becoming adept at using those tools. Though it’s definitely not what the majority of us would prefer, it certainly has helped keep many companies moving forward with business as usual.

We’ll never go back to the way things were in 2019. The top business leaders are incorporating these new ideas about the

workspace into their long-term plans. Are you?

Employee-employer relationships

With tens of millions of people in our country and hundreds of millions worldwide having experienced layoffs, furloughs, pay cuts and other less dramatic disruptions, the foundations of trust in the employee-employer relationship were shaken, if not destroyed. What does this mean for us as leaders? How can we rebuild and strengthen relationships with our people?

Having clear strategies for engaging and empowering people are more important than ever in the current chaos. This is especially true for the green industry and the numerous businesses dependent on flexible seasonal staffing.

Business planning

We learned quickly that traditional business planning and management is no match for a pandemic. How were any of us to know what was coming down the pike as we set our goals way back in the fourth quarter of 2019?

Though we had great plans and big ideas, a lot of that work went to waste as those goals had nothing to do with re-shifting entire business models to adhere to new guidelines and regulations. How can we think differently about how we plan for the next month, quarter or year?

Thousands of businesses in our country have already



closed and many more are on the brink. However, many businesses will survive and move forward in this new reality. To lead the pack, companies will need strong, flexible leaders who are excited to face the challenges head, have a compelling vision communicated clearly and often to an aligned team, and will run on meaningful, timely data.

How do you get there? We have a few suggestions.

1. Create and communicate a compelling vision

A foundation of business success begins with a clear plan for the future that makes a difference in the lives of those served. This vision must include both a long-term view of a future better than today, as well as plans for short-term tactics that move the business forward in meaningful ways.

It must also include plans for building and maintaining a desired culture based on shared values. And it must be flexible enough to adjust to our fast-changing society and economy.

To make the vision compelling, effective leaders, now more than ever, must be skilled and practiced at clearly communicating the vision.

Some of our clients who really excel at this communicate their company's vision through banners, posters, or words painted on the walls of their buildings. Others include it on their business cards and in their email signatures. We even have one owner who has it tattooed on his arm!

Just joking about that last one — but

you get the point. Your company's vision cannot sit on a piece of paper in the owner's office. In order to get your team fully aligned around where you're going, they have to be privy to the plan, engaged in the business, and ready to adjust when things change.

2. Align your team

Great leaders successfully navigate turbulent times by making sure their team is aligned with the vision for the future, the values on which the culture is built, and a clear, prioritized action plan broken into weekly increments. There needs to be a rhythm of weekly tracking and check-ins that focus on adjusting to what's happening in real time.

So, how do you align your team around a single goal? Better yet, how do you optimize your team members' skills and strengths to come up with and make that next great idea a reality? We truly believe a team of people aligned with a compelling vision all working in harmony can bring to life great ideas an individual can only dream of.

In order to overcome the eroding employer-employee relationship, this alignment must exist throughout the organization. Successful business leaders execute tactics that drive this alignment throughout the company, embedding it in all areas including the recruiting, selection, and performance management processes.

This includes setting clear expectations for how the alignment comes to life in the direction of the company as well as the

behaviors of the people and the results of their work. It also includes regular one-on-one meetings with your team members with meaningful feedback on how they measure up to the expectations.

This is important in every business in the current upheaval and even more so for every business with people who are remote and spend their days out in the field.

3. Identify and track meaningful data

Especially in a time of chaos, measuring progress toward a compelling vision with meaningful, actionable, and timely data is critical. Using real-time data tracked on a weekly cadence to manage a business can accelerate the business quickly past your competitors. This is especially true in the green industry with diverse projects across a large geography with a work force that leaders might seldom see.

Many business systems collect all sorts of data and really, most business leaders and managers actually have more data than they know how to use.

The secret to success is to identify the few metrics that are most meaningful. We recommend a mix of forward-looking, activity-based metrics, as well as backward-looking data to confirm the results. With meaningful and timely data, an aligned team can make decisions to adjust the business responsively to a quickly changing environment.

We've seen success in businesses with leaders who consistently communicate a compelling vision, gather an aligned team, and empower them to manage the business, all while keeping their finger on the pulse of meaningful, timely data. ☺

Jerry Olson is a business adviser with The Resultants, a business advisory team that advocates for the best interest of clients, using a process that has proven time and time again to help companies build value and achieve personal and professional success. To learn more, visit www.theResultants.com. This article originally appeared in Scoop magazine, and is reprinted with the permission of the author and of the Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association.

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