

BPE Global Hot Topic – April 2020

Calling All Leaders



We hope that you are keeping yourself, your loved ones, and your community safe from COVID-19. This is a scary time for businesses, but it pales in comparison to what real-life anxieties and fears it brings up for employees. I'll be honest, my business is nothing without its employees so taking care of them and making sure that they are alright is my number one mission in life.

One of the biggest lessons that I have learned over the years is that in times of crisis, it is essential to provide a way for people to move forward. This is indispensable in the face of the unknown. So how do you do this? Well, it's up to leadership to guide all global citizens through this. And I want to point out that I don't mean "the boss" when I say "leader." I mean you and me. I don't care what your job is, I do know that you are capable, empathetic and possess the skills of a leader. Now that I have your attention - it is essential that we as leaders understand that we play a vital role in rallying everyone towards resiliency. So how do we do that? It is not that hard if you think about what you would expect from your leaders. Here are the core attributes what all of us must bring forward during this moment in time.

Communicate The most important thing is to communicate. Set up regular check ins with each team member and with the whole team. I always set an agenda for my calls, but I try to start with asking each team member for an update on how they are doing. And I do my best to make sure that I am really listening during this time and not focusing on the list of things that I need to cover. We must all remember that our team has a deep understanding of our company's work and they can provide sage wisdom and ideas on how to survive this pandemic. We must also remember that our team may not actively volunteer the fact that they have concerns and questions, but we can intuit from how they communicate that there may be underlying topics when we actively listen.

Lead Great leaders don't just lead during crisis; they teach other people to lead. Great leaders encourage their team to help develop strategies to overcome the challenges and don't take all the burden on their own shoulders. Even if we don't know what will happen next, having a focused strategy and engaging your team to lead will go a long way. We don't know how long we will be required to shelter in place (SIP), we do have the ability to develop the plan on how we will reenter our community once the SIP orders are removed. We don't travel a lot, but it has helped our team to know that we won't plan on travelling anytime soon after the SIP orders are lifted. One other thing that great leaders do is to lead by example, challenge other leaders and raise the bar on how to provide solutions. I have personally been doing this by reaching out to news outlets to let them know that the Section Tariffs are still being assessed on a plethora of PPEs that we need to fight COVID-19. Each of us must demand our political and corporate leaders to do better.

Make it Personal It's essential that each employee within your company knows that your organization has a COVID-19 response and how it applies to them. It is critical that you speak to each of your direct reports and make sure that they know you are considering them as well as the company during this period. Make sure to ask each employee if they are getting enough information and whether they have questions or suggestions. It's important to speak to what the company is doing now to understand the impact of the pandemic and what it will do should the containment efforts become more stringent or impact your customers to the point where the work slows down or the company closes. Now is the time to bring profound tenderness to every interaction.



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Support If your team isn't used to or set up for working from home, give them the space to become accustomed to the reality. Take the time to understand what materials and equipment they need to do their job. It is important to provide the tools that your team needs to make their environment work so they can be successful. Good printers can be found for under \$200 and an extra monitor can make the home environment almost as efficient as the office. We're learning that many of our clients have never worked from home, so we're able to listen to them and coach them through how we've managed to make it work over the past 15 years that we have been in business. Nothing is going to be the same after this is all over, make the investment now to adjust.

Help If your company has an established philanthropic program, they should already be engaged in how to help those most at need. We're a small shop, so we reimburse our employees when they donate to causes of their choices. We usually do that at the end of the year. This year, we're moving it up to enable our team to give to people in need during such a scary time. There are so many things that we can all do during this difficult time. Let's all try to find ways that can create a more caring world.

Employ My company is successful because we take care of our employees. They come first. If you think you're your business will survive without safeguarding your employees, you are putting your entire enterprise at risk. Your business won't be successful unless your employees are protected. Now is the time to defend for your employees that means trying your darndest to keep their jobs and their benefits. It also requires that you create a safe environment for them to work in. If they require Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to do their jobs – get the PPE. This is not the time to be stingy or take risks with your people.

We all must understand that the vast majority of us have never been through anything anywhere close to what we are experiencing today. And we might not have access to the tools we would reach for under normal circumstance. We might not be able to control many things that we used to be able to control. So just concentrate on what you can control. And the main thing is that as leaders we can be open, we can be honest, and we can be brave. Give your team as much insight as you can – they will understand if you must make uncomfortable decisions. More importantly, we will all help each other get through this. It just takes someone to lead the way.

This is probably the most challenging time we will face as business leaders. We are in this together – so let's start leading our teams, our communities and our countries out of this.

Stay well, wash your hands, call your friends, provide a bright light to the people most at risk. My best to you, your loved ones and everyone that relies on you.

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