

# ***Leadership for the New Normal***

## **Synopsis**

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***By***

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Ever-changing scenarios in technology, business, and the economy are impacting the way we deliver education and support services through our continuing education organizations. We are finding it necessary to move to ever-higher levels of creativity, data-driven decision-making and productivity. Since very rapid change is “The New Normal,” it is crucial that we center ourselves on best practices in leadership, with a focus on change management and organizational development. These practices can energize a shared vision with well-targeted effort and creativity.

Within this “new normal,” what defines cutting-edge leadership, what is the role of communication in leadership, how do we inspire it at all levels, and how do we organize for action?

The business model for continuing education units includes a commitment to quick turnaround, and this is even more important in the new normal. As the leader of a dynamic program at the University of New Mexico, I advise that responsive or resonant leadership is crucial, because it positions us as most ready for rapid response. Resonant leadership, as defined by Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee (2005) includes mindfulness, hope and compassion during times of stress and change.

- Mindfulness of oneself, others and our organizational environment is a crucial foundation to leadership today. Dedication to excellence is the active partner to mindfulness, leading us to our own personal growth and the success of our organizations. This objective view of the current state becomes a springboard for future action.
- Hope – How one communicates hope is integral to visionary leadership, as it is the feeling that motivates us toward the future vision of our organizations. It carries us through difficult times and barriers. Leaders need to be purveyors of hope in the new normal.
- Compassion – Part of our organizational mission should be to create a positive, supportive environment for our employees and those we serve. Compassion and caring help us move through times of disagreement, anxiety, and fear, often present during times of rapid change.

As part of mindfulness, we should have a growing awareness of both our internal and external dialogue, because leaders need to communicate frequently and effectively during times of change. I quote Anthony Robbins: “The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives.”

As a leader, it is important to be aware of our internal dialogues, to be present and open, and to practice gratitude and hope. Awareness of internal dialogue, as discussed by Eckhart Tolle in A New Earth, is a practice in mindfulness that can guide leaders in meaningful ways during changing times.

To lead with good observation and planning, one must start with a balcony view. As leaders we need to step outside of our normal range of vision and ask well-targeted objective questions such as: “What is really going on in this inter-departmental conflict?” “What is holding us back from top performance in this particular unit of the organization?” “What is the unspoken – what are the elephants in the room?” As leaders in today’s fast – paced environment, we are challenged to skillfully facilitate dialogue, orchestrate conflict, and be dedicated in our planning and problem-solving efforts. We need to encourage creativity and help our teams reach common ground. As data-driven decision makers we should focus on the facts and establish urgency toward progress. Whether you consider the points of contention to be good or bad, a crisis is a great mobilizer – and a terrible thing to waste, because it can propel us to new solutions. We have an important role as planning leaders and coaches and need to take solid action through crisis.

Responsive leadership requires courage and decisiveness. Today’s leaders make informed and often bold decisions. Consider Opera legend Caruso ridding himself of his stage fright demons. Backstage, before a performance, he could be heard muttering to himself, “Out, out you miserable little me!” So, chase out the “little me” to let your courage surface and shine as an inspiration to others.

No great things have ever been accomplished before all possible objections are overcome. Take risks. This is a time where creativity and rapid response are of utmost importance. If you haven’t already taken your continuing education unit into best practices in data-driven decision-making, get your systems in place and train your teams to make decisions and recommendations on facts. This will minimize risk and move you in good directions.

Responsive leaders develop their employees to meet the challenges of a changing environment. Engage your human resource management professionals to conduct a workforce review, where current and required skill sets in your organization are recorded, then analyzed for gaps. Here, you can get clarity on training and development needs, what new positions are required to take you to the next level, and where succession management is most needed.

Everyone knows it’s more fun to lead in expansive times than in times of cutback, so it’s important to pace the work and keep showing your employees the future. Also keep in mind that you should continue to grow and improve your organization even during times of cutback. Lean on sound planning and accountability strategies to move your organization from current state to the desired vision. Resonant leaders who collaborate with their teams to shape the common vision will thrive during challenging times.

During this New Normal it is often challenging to confront the elephant in the room: “Isn’t it dangerous to lead in times of change?” To this question, I close with these thoughts:

- It's scarier not to change, because we risk extinction
  - We preserve our ability to lead by orchestrating conflict and change– not becoming it
  - We must lead, manage and delegate with conviction
  - Use best practices in organizational development
  - Coach employees to excellence
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Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee., Resonant Leadership . (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005).

Eckhart Tolle, A New Earth.. (New York: Penguin, 2005).