

Leading with Purpose in a Time of Crisis

Global Prairie has been helping our clients identify and leverage their purpose for positive business impact since we first opened our doors in 2008. As a Public Benefit Corporation born in the Great Recession, and with deep expertise in crisis counseling, we also know how to rise to the challenge of uncertain and unpredictable times. For customized support leveraging your purpose and leading your organization through this time, contact us at info@globalprairie.com.

Crisis: *an unexpected event or sequence of events of enormous scale and overwhelming speed, resulting in a high degree of uncertainty that gives rise to disorientation, a feeling of lost control, and strong emotional disturbance*

Purpose: *the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists; one's intention or objective*

Research shows that leading with purpose at your core is good for business on every level – driving financial performance, innovation, growth, team engagement and positive societal impact. In times of crisis, purpose plays an even more fundamental role for organizational leadership: serving as a north star that, when followed, makes your organization even stronger in the long term. Here, we outline the key tenets to leading with purpose in a time of crisis.

→ **Ground everything in your purpose**

“One of the main questions critics have about the purpose movement is whether organizations will abandon their principles when the bottom line is on, well, the line. But the best leaders are able to turn short-term tragedy that hurts their organizations into a sense of shared purpose and community that betters it in the long term.” – research by Korn Ferry

Now is the time to lean into your purpose, more than ever before. In times of crisis, it's imperative to work together with your team to do the right thing, with an eye toward the impact you will make on the world for the better. To focus not solely on what you do, but why you do it. To let your company values guide your decisions, both short- and long-term.



Leaning into your purpose now will:

- Ensure your decisions and actions during this stressful time are strategically sound
- Give your internal team something certain to hold onto, when so much is uncertain
- Create a consistent, steady and resilient presence for external audiences, signaling they can count on your organization to weather this storm
- Create a sense of unity and community for your organizational ecosystem

Is it time to reimagine your purpose? Or recommit to it? Like people, organizations show their true character in difficult times. Thus, this may be just the time to assess who you really are and the unique value you bring to the world – why the world needs your organization – so that you can ride that knowledge and commitment to new heights as the world recovers from this crisis.

→ **Organizational wellness starts with you**

Now more than ever people will be looking to the leadership team for clues to how they should be feeling and behaving. If you're going to be effective in that role, you must make sure you are taking good care of yourself and modeling strong emotional and mental wellness. Make sure you are surrounded by a network of peers – both within and outside your company – who can support and sustain your ability to think clearly, remain levelheaded, process vast amounts of new information and make quick, smart decisions.

Ask yourself as a leader:

- Am I spending enough time taking care of myself, so that I can be the best version of myself when leading others?
- Do I have what I need to get through this? If not, who else can I pull into my support team?
- How will I measure my own performance?
- How do I want my leadership from this time to be remembered?

→ **People are the priority**

“Business is about pursuing a noble purpose and putting employees and human relationships at the heart of how a business operates.” – Harvard Business Review

No matter what kind of organization you are, people are key to your success. Making sure your internal and external audiences know that you care about their wellbeing, as people, is priority number one. As a leader you have great potential to make real, immediate impact on people's lives with the decisions and actions you make during this time. The following two tips will help in this regard.

First, people crave communication – the more open, clear, consistent and transparent, the better. Now is the time to communicate what you know, what you don't know and what you're doing to make sound decisions moving forward. It's important to communicate this information early to bypass speculation and concern. In most instances, leaders rely on experience when speaking to a current problem or issue. While there's no modern-day blueprint for a pandemic, you can draw from other times when the organization has had to be resilient, weather difficulties and adapt for a better future. In times like these leaders who speak with heart and show their authentic character engender a sense of connection and calm company-wide.

Second, empower others on your team to carry this torch with you. Natural leaders arise during times of great challenge, and they may or may not be the people holding official leadership roles. Gather this group and give them the information and encouragement they need to model a sense of resilience, optimism, fortitude and adaptability for those around them. Encourage them to focus a good deal of their time spreading the messages you need carried so that employees are hearing it from all directions. This group can also listen and bring critical information back that official leaders may not otherwise hear.

→ **Keep your eye on the long game**

While you must attend to the pressing matters of the crisis situation, it's important not to lose focus on the long game. Purposeful leaders use times of struggle to reimagine, reinvent, innovate and build capabilities so their organizations can thrive down the road.

Stay the course on key priorities and instead of taking reactionary permanent action during a temporary situation, take a step back to reevaluate, shift resources, innovate and track against progress. Companies that take a slash-and-hold approach tend to fare worse than those that thoughtfully invest in their strategic approach. The crisis might affect how projects are executed and how goals are achieved, but the purpose-driven goals should remain.

Strategic planning and related bigger-picture activities also give your team something future oriented and optimistic to focus on, which can have incredibly positive ripple effects across the organization. The following figure represents the balance we recommend between short- and long-term focus and communication.



Finally, learn as you go. Observe what's working in this new normal and how you can continue to build on these efficiencies and innovations to improve your capabilities and outcomes. How you choose to react now will shape your competitiveness and strategic position for years to come.