

Leading Through Turbulence

Original post from: www.avantleadership.com/blog



While navigating change is challenging for all, it is a distinct opportunity for leaders to provide clarity, confidence and engagement to the broader organization.

Leadership is no small undertaking – even during good times. How then do you effectively lead during turbulence? Times when your company is facing industry or market headwinds, restructuring or during economic downturns.

The first step a leader should take is to look inward and be self-aware. What are your emotional responses to turbulent times? Do you become agitated, anxious, angry, gloomy? Leaders do need a place to “let their hair down” and yet their responsibility is to be intentional about what they transmit throughout the organization. I suggest that leaders focus on their self-management (emotions and messages) and understand how it effects the organization.



your people. your culture. your partner.

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At times, leaders underestimate the social-psychological impact they have on their team, subordinates (each having their own motivations, perspective, etc.) and organizational culture. Under duress, leader behaviors and words can often be amplified both favorably and unfavorably. It is important for leaders to be realistic about the tough times while offering optimism to keep people going.

Below are key tasks leaders can focus on to keep people connected, engaged and confident.

✓ Validate

- Acknowledge current realities
- Be genuine and confirm what is true, be sure to quickly address rumors

✓ Normalize

- Business cycles are a "fact of life"
- Share when your organization has faced similar challenges

✓ Over Communicate

- Frequently and consistently communicate
- Avoid rationalizations for not communicating
- Remember that absent communication, employees may fill in the blanks with fears

✓ Empathize

- Ask questions and listen to others
- Relate common experiences where possible
- Engage employees more than usual

✓ Focus

- Help your employees identify what they can and can't control
- Create clear action steps to address what is controllable

! Communication Pitfalls

- I am too busy with the business
- The details are still unclear so I have nothing to share right now
- They do not need to know yet
- They have been told once before or I told my direct reports to cascade the message

The suggested leadership behaviors are not intended to be comprehensive but rather provide a good jumping off point for what will work in your organization. While navigating change is challenging for all, it is a distinct opportunity for leaders to provide clarity, confidence and engagement to the broader organization. These leaders not only successfully guide their team and business through difficulties but often distinguish themselves showing they are ready for next level leadership.

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For more than 30 years, Avant has advanced leadership and organizational performance with Fortune 500 companies. Avant is led by Kristin L. Ihle, Ph.D.