

Leadership in a *New Workplace*



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As businesses prepare for a return to work in the coming months, one of the most important questions that every leader must be ready to address is: How do we operate differently to ensure that our people are still engaged and motivated? Beyond questions surrounding how to resume regular operations, we must first consider how we'll successfully lead our teams through the drastic changes in their work environment. Every person in your organization has been profoundly impacted on an emotional, mental and financial level over the past few months—therefore, it's unreasonable to expect that we can continue to communicate, direct and inspire them in the same way that we always have. Leading an individual through change can be challenging in and of itself because, by nature, change is uncomfortable for everyone. The responsibility of a leader to address change within each person on an entire team makes the challenge exponentially more difficult. In order to do this successfully, we must focus our leadership in two key ways: First, by creating an environment in which all members within the organization feel heard. And second, by ensuring that each individual feels inspired to perform at their best. As organizational leaders, we are the captains of our respective ships, and even as we return to work, we'll be steering our crew through very stormy waters.

I've often seen leaders navigate such situations by communicating to their teams exclusively on a group level. Such an approach can often lack empathy or be dismissive of the concerns that many people on the team may have. This unprecedented time has impacted the members of our organization in so many different ways that if we fail to have empathy for each of these individuals, we run the risk of alienating people who are important to our team. In my experience, the most respected leaders of change are the ones who find ways to connect with their people on an individual level and tailor their approach to each of them, thus providing the specific guidance that the person needs. If we think about communication as a Venn diagram, people often spend too much time in their own "circle." That is, they are only viewing things through their own lens, with their own level of understanding on the given subject matter. Particularly during times of great change, this will

lead to a great deal of miscommunication and frustration. What we must do is identify that point of understanding where the circles intersect, and only then can we have meaningful conversations in which all parties feel heard. While having such interactions with each team member may not be a reasonable proposition given the size of the organization, at minimum we must make ourselves more accessible during times of change. This may mean that our days will become longer or we have less capacity to focus on other key decisions, but the relationships that we have with our people are partnerships and, ultimately, our success is dependent on theirs.

Here at Morton Capital, our entire leadership team has an open-door policy that allows all employees access to anyone at the firm, regardless of their position. Last week, our CEO, Jeff Sarti, spent 90 minutes on a Zoom meeting with an entry-level employee on his second week, just to welcome him to the firm and share Jeff's own expertise on the industry, as well as some best practices on how the new employee can be successful as he begins down the path of a new career. In several organizations, a divide between "management" and "the team" often exists because those at lower levels feel that their efforts go unrecognized. One of Morton's senior advisors and partners, Chris Galeski, has a reputation for coming downstairs every morning and giving a fist bump to everyone on the Operations Team, just to say thank you for the work that we are doing. Not only is this gesture a sign of great appreciation, it makes the entire team want to work harder just to provide support to Chris and his team.

As we look to increase the level of direct communication and accessibility with our people, we must utilize these conversations as opportunities to identify if their drive to excel has been impacted by the recent changes. For example, if you have employees in sales who rely heavily on performance incentives, they may find that due to the current economic environment, their income will be significantly impacted and, therefore, their motivation to bring their best self to work has decreased. While that's certainly an understandable concern, as leaders, in order to push our organizations forward, we still need our people to

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consistently perform at their best. It's my belief that while not everyone would choose to work in their current jobs if they didn't need the income, there are always additional components of their job or company in which they find value. Wherever that inspiration lies, as leaders we can always find opportunities for them to shine and contribute. Do you have someone on your team who values making an impact on their local community? Identify a way that your organization can lend support and give them that platform to contribute. Perhaps you have a team member who finds value in engaging in work that makes an impact towards their company's vision. Identify metrics that demonstrate how their daily contributions are helping to drive the organization forward and celebrate those successes on a daily basis.

Navigating teams through change is always a challenging proposition. As leaders, while we may be confident that we're steering our ship in the right direction, we cannot do so successfully without the support of our team. Individual connection and motivation are both key components of successfully leading change with our teams. However, there may come a time when we need to continue to push forward, even if only 95% of our people are supportive of our direction. How we work with the remaining 5% may be for a different discussion, but as long as we've connected with them, listened to their concerns and made genuine attempts to provide them with the support they need, we should feel confident in the direction in which we're steering the organization. Continue to focus on motivating your team, because, as we know, the ship will only sail if we all work together.

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