Effective Leadership in Times of Crisis

The coronavirus pandemic has placed heavy burdens on business leaders. The sheer size of the outbreak and its unpredictability generate fear among employees and make it challenging for executives to respond effectively. But during a crisis like COVID-19, people look to their leaders for direction and compassion; they need to have confidence in their ability to navigate the company into the future.

"If we truly believe that people are our most important asset, then we must lead them and communicate with them while providing an organization they can believe in," says Bert Miller, President and CEO of **MRI**Network. "In times of crisis, people need a solid anchor. They need their leaders to distill what's happening for them so that they understand the why of what's behind decisions that are being made. It's important to show that leadership cares for the individual, the company and the community."

Beyond caring, leaders must show they have a plan. "Timing is important, and you don't need to have everything determined," says Miller, "but you do need to be calm, confident and transparent about what is driving decisions. A leadership team that looks ahead proactively, and responds rather than reacts, goes a long way toward helping people in volatile times."

COVID-19 has already changed the way we live and work. At the same time most companies are still trying to determine the long-term impacts on their business, they also have to inspire trust in their workforces, who are trying to function and perform while struggling to cope with what is happening in their daily lives. "To inspire trust, you have to have something of a trust bank built up in the past that confirms trust as a core value," Miller believes. "The ability of leaders to address people's needs, especially in a crisis situation, is the foundation of trust."

Miller has spent more than 25 years helping companies strengthen their workforces with top-level performers; his advice to companies in crisis today is gleaned from what he's learned from some of best business leaders in the world:

- **Know what's happening in your organization**. Gather feedback from all areas and all levels of the organization.

- **Put your most visible leaders on the front lines based on compassion and caring, essentially EQ.** Workers will remember the faces and voices you empower to lead during this time. Be sure those voices are not only smart and accomplished, but also compassionate and caring.

- **Integrate your company's purpose and values into every communication and initiative.** Shared purpose and values give employees the sense of connection they need right now.

- **Tell a story, don't just circulate the data.** People are wired to find meaning and respond best to stories and analogies during times of great stress. They want to have insight into the larger story.

- **Make sure all communication is consistent.** Leaders throughout the organization have to be on the same page so pay attention to the tone and the principles behind every communication.

- **Now is the time to rethink remote workforce capabilities for at least some of your workforce.** Although setting up new ways of doing things might not seem like a good idea during a crisis, the current situation leaves many companies with no other choice. Determine how you can help your people make full use of technology to do their jobs and provide other resources they need as they embrace an altered world of work.

Miller's final piece of advice to leaders: "Focus your team's attention - don't let the current crisis distract them and provide as normal of an environment as possible in abnormal times. Pivot as needed and ensure leadership is aligned on your business's objectives," he says. "Consistently focus some of your attention on getting your organization and your workforce to the future."