

Letter from our CEO: Leadership in a Pandemic

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Pandemics are unlike any other challenge we face as leaders. There are no words to fully describe the feeling of dread when you find out one of your colleagues has fallen ill. There are also no words to describe the feeling of pride when you hear of a colleague going out of their way to help others in hard-hit areas of the world.

As a leader, you want to always have the right answers and know what to do, but these last few weeks have plunged many of us into a situation that most have never faced before, and one that lacks clear answers. I cannot help but think the best path forward right now is for senior leaders to share with their peers what they are doing to navigate this situation, and what they have learned from past challenges.

Last week we published [guidance on leading through uncertainty](#). I also wanted to share with you what we have seen successful leaders do to drive leadership performance and accelerate development in a time of crisis like this:

- **Take Note of What this Moment Reveals About Your Leaders:** During the 2008-09 financial crisis, many companies found that a surprising share of their leaders were unwilling or unable to lead in a challenging environment. Many also found that they had underestimated leaders who stepped up in unexpected, critical ways. Take note of what this period reveals about your bench. The coming weeks will expose empty suits and surface hidden gems.
- **Play Offense and Defense:** The biggest shifts in a sector's competitive rankings occur during moments of uncertainty, including downturns. Defensive measures are essential, but the best leaders also think strategically about opportunities to go on the offensive. This lesson applies as much to talent strategy as it does to business strategy.
- **Provide Rising Leaders with the Latitude to Lead:** During a crisis, senior executives have a natural tendency to assert control, stripping away leadership responsibility from their direct reports in an effort to mitigate risk. As a result, rising executives become operators and executors, not leaders and decision-makers. Your team's leadership skills will atrophy, and those weaknesses will echo through your leadership ranks for years afterwards.
- **Don't Assume that We Will Soon Enter a Buyer's Market for Talent:** External hiring for top talent is about to get much harder. In environments characterized by extreme uncertainty and risk, high performers in stable roles often become highly risk averse and unwilling to risk a transition, even when unsatisfied with their current situation. Many forecasters believe that we are heading toward a buyer's market for talent. We are not.

For an expanded version of this guidance, please [click here](#).

This is a shared challenge we are all facing together. We stand ready to assist with any help or guidance you may need.

Regards,

Clarke

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