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*The need for a
leadership reset as we
enter the second wave*

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2020 has been a year of disruption. The outbreak of COVID-19 forced businesses and people across the globe to uproot their normal working and personal lives and adapt overnight. And yet, the last four weeks have brought on a shift that feels tangibly different.

Many businesses were on the brink of offices reopening. Employees were enthusiastic to say goodbye to the endless Zoom meetings and get back to, at least in part, a vibrant place to work. Families and friends, near and far, were giddy to reunite. Feelings of relief, excitement, and hope were salient in the air. Before we could even get a taste of, dare we say 'normality', a second wave and the tightening of lockdowns across the UK have brought us, yet again, to what feels like a screeching halt.

The Workforce



We have witnessed *resilience, collaboration,* and *innovation*

The onset of the pandemic sparked fear, anxiety and panic for frontline workers, to senior executives. Many industries shut down entirely, and those that could transitioned to new ways of working overnight. However, even throughout the initial chaos we witnessed immense resilience.

Many organisations and their people thrived by reconnecting with or reimagining their purpose - a North Star guiding them through difficult times. Teams banded together to find innovative ways to pivot services to address new customer needs. Employees adapted and carried on, many putting in longer hours whilst juggling childcare. We saw leaders make changes to put the health, safety and wellbeing of their workforce first - a shift in priorities that will outlast this pandemic.

Will that *hope and energy* last another wave?

But the disruption-fuelled buzz has drastically tapered off as we entered the more chronic phase of the crisis, with serious repercussions for the resilience of our workforce. [Over half of UK workers report](#) working the same or more hours since the start of the pandemic - spending days in relentless meetings, tackling complex problems that require immediate and urgent action. With sharp increases in COVID-19 cases, new lockdowns, and inevitable recession and job cuts, the workforce at mass is questioning whether all of their hard work and bunkering down has paid off - **we pivoted, we adapted, we stayed home, we kept working**, and it seems like it didn't make any difference. As one senior leader recently commented, *"We've got nothing left to give."*

Employee burnout is a huge operational concern, with job insecurity, hopelessness and fatigue at an all-time-high. On top of this, we have seen a sustained period of heightened stress fuel our flight-or-flight 'cave man' mindset - prompting changes in personal behaviours that negatively impact relationships and performance, and are a direct threat to innovation and collaboration. *Resilience has never been more critical for organisational success.*

The Role of *Leaders* - Pressing Reset

"I feel my role has totally changed. It's all about dealing with the human issues - I hadn't thought of my leadership like that before." *(Client Senior Leader)*

The need to inspire and build resilience in the workforce is polarising managers from great leaders of the future. The role of a leader has been drastically tested and changed in 2020, with a greater call to build resilience, to energise and to support their people more than ever before. To combat the recent shift in mood we are seeing across the workforce, the role of the leader again needs a drastic reset. Gone are the early pandemic days of short-term crisis management, where leaders were required to firefight problems, redirect people's anxious energy into something productive and purposeful, and be a central calming force. Where that energy has been drained, the resilient leader needs to move from calming to catalysing.



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What can leaders do to *recharge their people* and reboot resilience?

Reconnect

“The key to our success has been an unrelenting focus on purpose. By continually coming back to our why, we’ve asked different questions, shifted how we think and been able to do and achieve so much more.” *(Client Chief Executive)*

Whilst the initial disruption and chaos has settled down, wellbeing could drop down the list of priorities. But positive wellbeing does not just mean a lack of stress. Biologically, people need some stress to motivate them to take action. A lack of passion, purpose and joy is as detrimental to resilience and wellbeing as the impact of stress and is what tips stress over into burnout.

Communicating the meaning behind the work, the impact it has on society, and clarifying individual contribution will re-engage employees with a compelling mission. Part of this requires leaders to jumpstart human connection. Whilst we’ve all experienced video conferencing fatigue (what one leader described as feeling ‘Zoom’d out’), new lockdowns are creating feelings of isolation all over again. Leaders need to consciously dedicate time and energy to fostering connection amongst their teams - as one leader pointed out **“Think connected working, not remote working.”**

But it is more than simply communicating a shared purpose. Resilient leaders exude passion for their mission, living and breathing it in everything they do. This passion trickles down and sets a precedent for others to find opportunity in crisis, and tap into their purpose in the day to day, even when the going gets tough (and tougher).

Take stock

As the pace of change slows and we settle into our new reality, it's easy for teams to revert back to previous ways of working that aren't suited to our current working world. Resilient leaders need to stop this in its tracks, lest organisations resume bad habits, forget lessons learned and be ill-equipped to handle future challenges and setbacks. Leaders need to support people to pause, take stock and celebrate achievements. But it's not about exuding false positivity - it's recognising the struggle that people have gone through and the hard work put in. Leaders also need to address disengagement outright, asking their people what they need and identifying how they can help. Being open and vulnerable about their own experiences and emotions over the past several months is particularly powerful in setting the tone and creating permission for others to share. Leaders also need to stop themselves slipping back into their own modus operandi and business as usual. Resilient leaders create space to reflect on their individual strengths, past setbacks, learnings, and how their emotional state and biases impact their ability to lead and inspire. They also surround themselves with diverse individuals who challenge their default approach, to foster innovation and risk-taking.....





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What can leaders do to *recharge their people* and reboot resilience cont.?

...but keep agility on the agenda

The need to take stock and consolidate learnings should not come at the expense of agility. Throughout the pandemic, leaders of resilient organisations have been decisive and quick to act in order to pivot services. Leaders of resilient teams and organisations need to continue to create the conditions for their people to adapt and evolve, take a broader perspective on the market, society and the future. Fast-moving organisations have made use of decentralised decision-making, war rooms and nerve centres to avoid the bottleneck of decision-making and empower key players with decision rights to enable agility.

Recharge

With disruption being our new normal, leaders need to prioritise recharging their own batteries. For many, being a leader has never been so challenging - having to dash from back-to-back Zoom meetings, motivate people remotely, navigate growing complexity around workforce safety, safeguard business performance, and trying to stay afloat on the ever-growing To-Do list and inbox.

Leaders can build their own resilience by focusing on a few core commandments:

- **Find your energy source:** Reflect over the past months and pinpoint what activities have energised you, and make these non-negotiable. That might be using commute time for a short walk or workout, or tapping into a personal passion like cooking or art. Since many of us are busier than ever, it is about being realistic and finding 1% gains - what is one small thing you can do every day that will build up a resilience 'buffer' over time?
- **Solidify a support network:** Have a trusted confidant to lean on for support when under pressure, or to use as a sounding board when decision-making seems impossible
- **Combat your own complacency:** Reconnect to your own meaning and individual purpose. What makes you get out of bed in the morning, and how can you find opportunities to do more of that now, rather than waiting for a chance to do so when we are 'back to normal'?
- **Create positive experiences:** Find ways to counteract the negative messages we are constantly bombarded with - what really makes you feel good and how can you fit this in on a daily or weekly basis? This could be setting a 'no news hour' in the evening or a rule around no 'corona-talk' at the dinner table.

Resilient leaders take care of themselves, as a crucial first step to taking care of others or their business - they fit their own oxygen mask first.



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