

A Leader's Guide to Crisis Resilience

*Collection of
Self-Assessments & Thought-Starters
to
Help Executives Navigate Crisis*

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What Is Your Energy Level?

Energy is essential to a high functioning executive. Consider energy as a blend of enthusiasm, commitment and drive as well as fitness for the role. An executive with energy is one who has the capacity to perform his/her job at a high level. Conversely an executive with low energy will compromise his/her ability to perform well.¹

This self-assessment is designed to identify your level of energy. On a scale of 1-5 (*with 5 being highest and 1 being lowest*) rate your energy level as it relates to how well you ENJOY doing each of the following:

- Set clear direction for those you lead
- Generate enthusiasm and optimism about the work
- Recognize and rewarding the good efforts of your direct-reports
- Lead up, e.g. helping your boss do his/her job better
- Find ways to collaborate with your colleagues
- Coach and develop your direct reports
- Make time for reflection, e.g. what you are doing; why you are doing it
- Exercise regularly (*3x cardio exercises per week*)
- Eat a healthy diet (balances of vegetables, fruits and meat)
- Spend quality time with family
- Make quality time for friends
- Find time for yourself to do things you like to do, e.g. hobbies, sports, etc.

Total:

65-59 High energy

58-45 Energy can improve

<45 Need to work on areas to improve energy

¹ Inspired by Tony Schwartz's work at [The Energy Project](#)

* * *

Action Steps

After you take the assessment identify on those areas where you rated yourself lower than 4. Choose three areas of focus. Consider this as an exercise in time management, e.g. find time to devote to what is important. Use the following questions to help you prioritize

- *What tasks can I delegate to others?*
- *What tasks can I eliminate all together?*
- *What things must I do MORE of?*
- *What things must I do LESS of?*
- *How will I know when I am succeeding?*



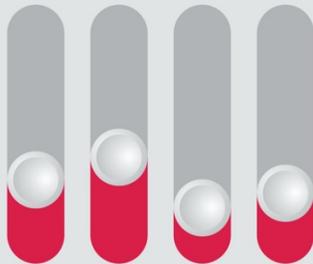
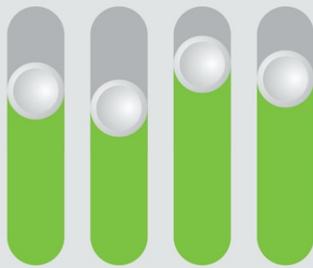
Questions for Leaders

- What about your work motivates you?
- What are your organization's goals?
- What are the challenges facing your department?
- What can you do to overcome these challenges?
- How are you helping your people achieve departmental goals?
- How can you help your boss lead more effectively?
- What are you doing to spread confidence?
- Bonus:
 - What is happening?
 - What is not happening?
 - What can I do to influence the outcome?



What Is Our Situation?

Leaders need to be attuned to what is happening within their organization. We call this “situation awareness.”¹



What is happening?

Take inventory of what people are doing and what effect they are having. Are things going well? If so why? If not, why not?

What is NOT happening?

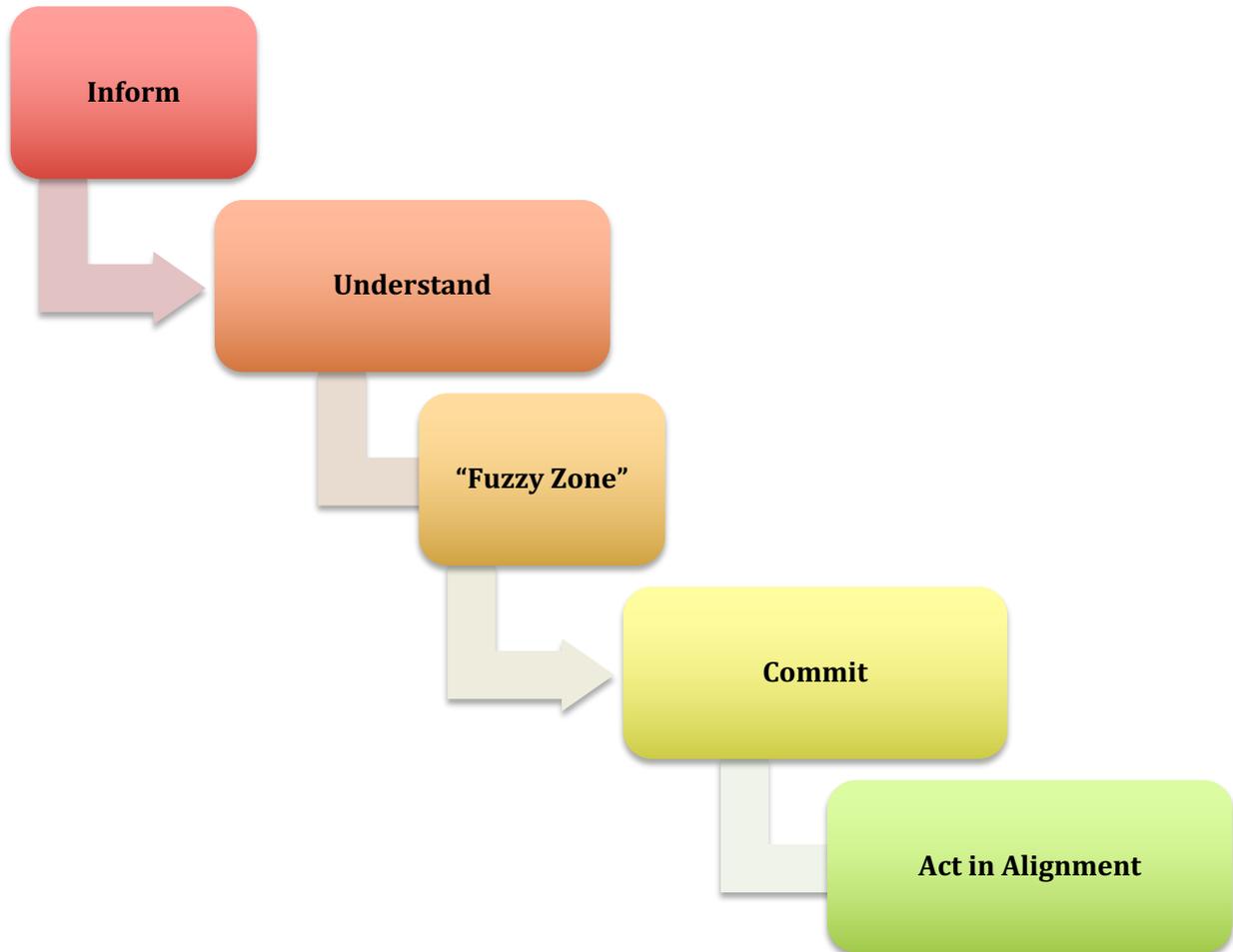
What is missing. What is the general mood and level of commitment. Are people engaged in what they do? If so, why? If not, why not?

What can I do to influence the outcome?

Knowing what is happening prompts the leader to take action. It will be the leader's decision to act individually or preferably with the collaboration of others.

¹ Three questions adapted from *Hope Is Not a Method* by Gordon Sullivan and Michael Harper, New York: Times Books, 1996

Aligned Action Model



One of the hardest tasks executives face is getting people to support and execute. While it is up to the boss to set direction, too often followers fail to follow through because they do not understand what they are asked to do and why.

The Aligned Action Model presents an easy-to-follow method for gaining support and commitment.²

- Inform – The leader explains the what and why of an initiative or course of action.
- Understand – The leader gives individuals time to digest the information, ask questions and internalize it.

² Adapted from work by Gene Schutt as cited in *How Great Leaders Get Great Results (AMACOM 2006)*
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- “Fuzzy Zone” – Even when people understand what and why they may not know how. It is up to the leader to enable people to develop “the how” as well as to figure out what the initiative means to them.
- Commit – Individuals choose to embrace the initiative and make it their own.
- Act – Individuals come together as a team to execute the initiative.

While this model is easy to explain, it can take months to follow. What’s more, it is up to the leader to continue to provide followers with new information to help them understand the urgency of the situation. The “Fuzzy Zone” can be a stumbling block so it is up to the leader to help them figure out what they must do. Once individuals are committed, they will implement the initiative because they believe in it.



Focus on Execution

Communications plays an essential role in getting things done. So often, leaders issue mandates and think they are done with it. That's failure number one.

Failure number two is not watching what's happening on the ground. So what's a leader to do? Here are some suggestions.

Create a sense of urgency. Pots do not stir themselves. If you want to get things done in a big way, or even a small way, you have to make some noise to attract attention. Executives in corporations will have to find their own ways to publicize reasons for change. For example, if you need to improve quality, bring in customers who are suffering from your products' shortcomings.

Health care providers use patient feedback forms to redesign processes from hospital admittance to post-surgery care and patient discharge. By making the feedback known, and then asking employees to act on it, you create an impetus for action.

Keep your ear to the ground. Listen to what people are telling you. Shrewd executives listen before they act, especially when they are new to the company. Listening puts employees on notice that the good ideas from inside the company are welcome. Over time, executives who listen are more in tune with what is really going on in an organization, rather than what they think or are told is going on. By listening, leaders keep their fingers on the heartbeat of an organization.

Follow up. Nothing communicates more powerfully than a leader who shows up to see how things are going. For example, CEOs routinely sign off on reorganizations, typically with the aim of reducing costs and improving efficiency. Such moves look good in annual reports, and even on the business pages, but do they really work?

Not often.

One reason is because those at the top do not always really investigate the outcomes of their actions. Senior leaders act as if the hardest part is signing their name to an initiative, or giving a speech. If that's the case, is there any wonder that so many transformations are doomed from the start? By contrast, leaders who listen and visit with people on the ground are those folks who make things happen. It's a simple matter of following up.

Source: Lead by Example by John Baldoni AMACOM 2009



Looking for Talent in a Post-Crisis World

Crisis brings out those who have been overlooked.

Cream rises to the top in hot coffee. Likewise, talent rises to the occasion when the situation grows hot. For this reason, leaders need to keep an eye out for employees who are ready, willing and able to help.

Out of the box thinking. When the world is being turned upside down, conventional thinking has failed. You need people who think differently. These are folks who can look at data and see patterns and make predictions that no one else can. They are relational thinkers who construct ideas by joining concepts from different disciplines.

Critical thinking. The ability to recognize the opposites can both be true is essential to strategic leadership. Leaders need to possess the capacity to reason with precision and to propose solutions that address problems.

Introverts. By nature, those who are quiet are observing without calling attention to themselves. You must look beyond “the noise” to determine what quiet people achieve. They are content let the work speak for itself. *[Note: this is not a criticism of extroverts, of whom I am one. It is a reminder that introverts do not call attention to themselves.]*

Confidence. When promoting someone you must ask: do this person inspire followership. Those who inspire have confidence in themselves as well as confidence in people around them. People feel good about following such a leader.

Team ethos. The ability to think of how actions impact others is essential to leadership. A person who knows that leaders accomplish little by themselves but much by working with others creates camaraderie and teamwork.

Trustworthiness. Do employees look to this individual as a trusted source of information. Such individuals are relied upon for their expertise as well as their reliability. They pull through.



Creating a Culture of Service

How can you develop a mindset of service to your colleagues?

Listen, don't judge
(Keep an open mind)

Replace "have to" with "want to"
(When it comes to doing your work)

Promote benefits over activity
(How does this help others?)

Adopt a me-last attitude
(Be humble)

Share credit and take blame
(Step out of the limelight)

*"The greatest untapped source of motivation is a sense of service to others."**

*Susan Dominus writing about the work of Adam Grant, a management professor at The Wharton School in *Is Giving the Secret to Getting Ahead?*, New York Times Magazine 3.31.13; also see Adam Grant, *Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success*, New York: Viking 2013

After Action Review

When a project – be it a meeting, or a new product launch – is completed, leaders owe to themselves to evaluate the positives and negatives. Doing so challenges the leader to think about what has occurred and what might be done differently in the future. The following questions will help generate the thinking process.

1. *Describe the project/event in terms of what you expected to do and what you actually accomplished?*
2. *What worked well and why did it work?*
3. *What did not work well and why did it not work?*
4. *What will you do differently the next time?*



Discovering the Grace within Yourself

GRACEful Self-Assessment

Consider how you are practicing the principles of grace. Consider this self-assessment as a tool to help you improve, not a way to give yourself on a pat on the back for how good you think you are.

Use 5-point scale to rate your behaviors with 5 being best, 1 being worst.

As an individual...

- I practice humility on a daily basis.
- I recognize my limitations but do not use them as an excuse for not doing something.
- I strive to look for the good in others before making a judgement about them.
- I consider it my responsibility to do something for the "greater good."
- I make sacrifices in my own personal comfort so that others can benefit.
- I am generous with my time to people in need.
- I forgive those who have wronged me before I ask them to apologize for their mistakes.
- I use my energy to do one kind thing for someone every day.
- I believe that compassion involves showing mercy on those who have been wronged.
- I respect the dignity of others because it is what I am called upon to do.
- Sub-total**

As a leader...

I practice humility as a means of opening myself up to learning from others.

I behave as if I am “the smartest person in the room” because I know if I do others will stay silent.

I assume people who work with me are acting with the best intentions until they prove otherwise.

I act for the “greater good” of the team before acting on what’s good for me.

I make time to listen to others even when it means I cannot focus on my immediate demands.

I make those with whom I converse feel wanted and empowered.

I insist that forgiveness be a team practice by allowing those who have transgressed the opportunity to make amends.

I derive my energy from watching my colleagues succeed.

I believe that compassion involves show concern through positive actions, not simply nice words.

I insist that our team practice dignity for others by showing respect for colleagues through their words and their actions.

Sub-total

Total Score

Note: I understand that my score is not a testament to how good I am but rather an assessment of how much more I can do.



Appendix

Forbes

LEADERSHIP POV / John Baldoni

March 11, 2020

Pandemics Reveal Leadership Character

“We have got to assume it is going to get worse and worse and worse.”

[Anthony Fauci](#), M.D., Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

As damaging as hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires and tornadoes are, their impact is most often local or regional.

Pandemics, by contrast, are global. When you combine a pandemic with uncertainty, you get a powerful formula for fear and even panic. And so that is why those in leadership positions need to step to the fore and be a positive presence for those they lead. [Dr. Fauci](#), who has been his institute’s director since 1984 during the AIDS crisis, is not given to hyperbole; he is telling the truth, and that’s what leaders must do, too.

A senior executive I know made this point just the other day. He also said something else: *be there for the younger employees*. These folks, as the executive explained, have not experienced downturns in the market. They were not around for 9/11 or even the Great Recession. It is essential, to be honest and forthcoming with them.

When adversity strikes, people are looking for direction and guidance, and that’s why leaders must exert their influence to shape the best way forward.

Leadership action steps

Avoid sugar coating. Be straight with people. Reveal what you can about the business, but do not make promises you cannot keep, e.g., no layoffs. Stick to the facts. And remember that even what you think is valid now may not be so tomorrow.

Stay connected. Whether your employees are in the workplace or working from home, make yourself available. Like you, they are feeling stressed about work as well as their family members. Listen to them. And keep listening. Be open to help when you can.

Take care. The stress on leaders now is enormous. Uncertainty weighs heavily. There often is a tendency is to push aside personal concerns. But if you are in charge, you must make certain you eat right, get enough sleep, and exercise when you can. Getting outside

for a quick walk not only provides you with some exercise, but it can also give you a break to clear your head.

Be safe. Follow all health and safety precautions, starting with stay home if you are ill. Cough or sneeze into your arm. Avoid shaking hands. Wash your hands regularly. (*Experts recommend singing the Happy Birthday to yourself twice to get the proper wash time correct.*)

“Adversity does not build character; it reveals it.”* And it will be the revelation of character that is necessary. Employees are looking to leaders who do not shirk from responsibility, but rather embrace the challenge. Such leaders do not hold themselves apart; they bring along others with them. They delegate responsibility and authority, all the while remaining in the loop to monitor what is happening.

As bad as this crisis is, it will present us with opportunities. What those opportunities are may be unknown, but as the saying goes, “never waste a good crisis.” Leaders must be thinking ahead as soon as they are able.

Accordingly, adversity reveals more than character; it also shines a light on talent. Women and men who have gone unnoticed suddenly find themselves in the spotlight with an opportunity to apply their skills to emerging problems. Doing so will mark them as people to give more responsibility and eventual promotions.

While we all hope that this crisis will pass in short order, health experts warn that more novel viruses will plague us in the future. How leaders act today will set the tone and pattern for how we deal with future crises.

*Troubles have a way of shrinking some,
But elevating the minds and hearts of others.
Follow me, they say. I will lead.
Come along, they say.
Together we will make our way.*

*Note: The quote about adversity is often attributed to [James Lane Allen](#), a 19th and 20th-century American novelist.

SmartBrief on Leadership

April 10, 20120

Dealing with Stress in a Resilient Way

No two people respond to adversity the same way.

Some folks embrace the challenge and figure things out for themselves. Others, the majority of us, need to help from experts to help us navigate the problems we are facing related to stress and fear. One expert I have turned to is Sharon Melnick, Ph.D., a leading authority on stress resilience who did a decade's worth of research work at Harvard Medical School.

Some managers may think that they do not have time to coach their people. "The leader doesn't have time to 'not do this,'" Dr. Melnick told me in an email interview. "All the research prior to this crisis indicates that employees who feel a sense of belonging and psychological safety will be engaged with the work and have loyalty to the manager and organization."

"Managers want to remember that the work gets done through people," says Dr. Melnick. A manager can alleviate stress through conversation. "That will help the employee spend more time on the work. And it will make that employee so much more motivated to work for that manager." Or, as Dr. Melnick says, "Going slow to go fast."

Dr. Melnick's book, [*Success Under Stress: Powerful Tools to Stay Calm, Confident and Productive When the Pressure's On*](#), is a useful resource for any manager wondering how to manage his fears let alone deal with the stress his employees are feeling. With Dr. Melnick's permission, I have pulled out some practical wisdom nuggets from a guide she adapted from her book.

Demonstrate optimism rooted in reality. When the world is coming apart, how can anyone be optimistic? "Optimism paints a positive mental picture of the future and implies there is something that each team member can do to help adapt and achieve success," writes Dr. Melnick. "It communicates your belief in your team, activates problem-solving abilities, and has even been shown to maintain healthy immune functioning." It is critical to ground optimism in the truth; however, discomfoting it may be. False promises undermine a leader's credibility.

Learn to balance your body's ON/OFF systems. "When you are ON, adrenalin helps you problem solve and carry out all the tasks of your day," says Dr. Melnick. "Because everything feels like a priority, we tend to use our ON system and push

ourselves all day.” Dr. Melnick writes in her guidebook that “This ON system is extremely useful for quick responses and tactical tasks, but we can make thinking mistakes like over-focusing on the problem or doing business as usual just to get it done expediently.”

Dr. Melnick advises that you need your OFF system to engage in strategic thinking and innovation. It is for this reason that executives may rush big decisions without taking time to deliberate beforehand. “With ongoing stress, it is important to activate that OFF system whenever you can,” says Dr. Melnick. “Taking mental breaks –getting away from what you are doing if only for a short period of time--is rejuvenating.”

One technique Dr. Melnick teaches is a breathing exercise. “Exhale for longer than you inhale. Breathe in for three counts, out for six counts. This kind of breathing can calm your mind quickly.” Another way to concentrate more fully is through mindfulness. Practicing it can be as simple as “slowing down your attention and focusing on the moment to moment tasks.”

Communicate regularly. Lack of control makes people stressed. Keep your people in the loop. Share information as much as you can. Dr. Melnick advises keeping directions short and to the point. And repeat directions often. When stress levels are high, people cannot absorb quantities of information, and they forget. For this reason, it’s also important to listen to your people. Empathize with their feelings of stress so they trust you and will follow your direction.

Keep your team’s spirits up. Things will go wrong. People will make mistakes. Be careful how you respond. Dr. Melnick writes, “Remind them they are doing their best under the circumstances. Encourage them to have someone who is safe to talk to about their sense of overwhelm, so they don't have to internalize the stress while putting up a tough front.”

Feeling stress is a human condition. So too is resilience. Applying techniques we gain from others, coupled with our own inner resolve, will enable us to manage it more effectively and, in turn, lead more capably and humanely.

Forbes

LEADERSHIP POV / John Baldoni

March 26, 2020

How to Build Your Leadership Resiliency

A modern airliner has upwards of 2 million parts. The reason for the considerable number is redundancy. There needs to be a backup component or system that can be activated automatically in case of an emergency. When you are flying at 30,000 more than 560 miles an hour, redundancy is a must-have.

The airliner example may be an apt motif for what is needed today in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Economic norms are crumbling, societal norms are shifting, and worst of all, health norms are out the window. Everyone is at risk. Organizations need redundancy, and so too do their leaders. Redundancy is an insurance policy for resiliency.

Resilient leaders manage with redundancy in mind. First off, they make certain that someone can step into their role should they leave unexpected. Secondly, they prepare their organizations. "Organizations deploy a 'good jobs' strategy have policies around cross-training and developing people so that if one unit or group falls short, others in the firm can pitch in because they have been pre-trained to do those jobs," says [Rita Gunther McGrath](#), author of [Seeing Around Corners](#) and professor at Columbia Business School. "If staff only know how to do one thing, in a crisis, they are only useful with respect to that one thing, and if that's not the critical bottleneck, there is a real wasted resource."

Developing resilience

A way to build redundancy within individuals is through self-discipline, willfully shutting out distractions so you can focus more acutely. "Intentionality probably builds some slack into our responses, because we're not using up a lot of bandwidth by diffusing our focus," says Helgesen, a prominent authority on women's leadership and co-author with Marshall Goldsmith of [How Women Rise](#). "So, if something unexpected occurs, we will have more mental resources- as well as physical energy- to respond quickly and effectively. And that definitely enables us to be resilient."

Resiliency often begins with a whack, a metaphorical smack that levels you because it is often unexpected. There is no shame in being knocked down. It is what you do next that matters. There is a Japanese saying, "Fall down seven times, get up eight."

[Warren Bennis](#), the noted leadership author and university president, posited the “[crucible of leadership](#),” a sort of trial-by-fire experience. Bennis's personal [leadership crucible](#) began as a 19-year old lieutenant replacement during the Battle of the Bulge. Knowing no one, Bennis lead his troops by relying first upon his first sergeant.

Resiliency is nurtured through a deep sense of self-awareness. [Harry Kraemer](#), former CEO of Baxter, Inc and professor of leadership at Northwestern’s Kellogg School of Management, [advises](#) being kind to yourself. "You're going to do the right thing, and you're going to do the best you can." Kraemer recommends using this mantra when the worst happens. “I try to repeat this over and over again. Worry, fear, anxiety, pressure, and stress can be significantly reduced.”

Self-awareness

Just as airliners have redundant systems so too can leaders. Individual redundancy depends upon self-awareness—knowing your strengths and weaknesses. During a crisis, your weaknesses may be exposed, so you need your personal backup system. For example, if you are a big picture strategist, you will need detail-oriented people to help plot recovery tactics.

Furthermore, stress also means we may over-rely on what we do well. Such compensation creates overuse, and eventually, you will drive good people away. That is, a confident and assertive leader will fall into the trap of exerting himself into all problems, thereby undercutting the people tasked with finding solutions.

[Helgesen](#), a colleague of mine, believes that we can build resiliency by limiting the time we spend multi-tasking. “When we ask our minds to focus on two things at once, our bodies perceive that as stress.” While you cannot eliminate stress, you can less its impact by focusing deliberately on the issue at hand before moving to another issue. “This is why being intentional, deliberate and mindful,” says Helgesen, “is key to resilience.”

Times of crisis require an executive with personal and organizational redundancy that enables resiliency in the face of adversity.

Forbes

LEADERSHIP POV / John Baldoni

March 20, 2020

A Leader's Best Friend in a Crisis Might Be Humor

There's an old show business adage that seems perfect for our times. "Life is easy," goes the saying. "Comedy is hard."

And so when I connected with [Trevor Smith](#), who bills himself as Certified Laughter Leader of the [World Laughter Tour, Inc.](#), I knew he would have some good advice for leaders dealing with the hard times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We use humor in crises to provide perspective and help us deal with the emotional turmoil and stress that we might be dealing with," says Smith, a therapist by training. "Humor also helps us in crises that help us develop a clear insight into our decision making and problem-solving abilities."

Smith says, "Humor is a great tool to use in a crisis that helps us look at that situation in a positive way that will us deal with the crisis. Humor lightens one's burdens, inspires hopes, and keeps you grounded, focused and alert. With so much power to heal and renew, the ability to laugh easily and frequently is a tremendous resource in confronting any crisis situation."

Leadership levity

Getting people to loosen up is a comedian or therapist's job, but with the pandemic upon us, leaders need to be vigilant about the emotional needs of their employees. Working in isolation can be taxing. It's up to a leader to keep people focused but also engaged. Humor can lubricate the situation in ways that enable people, if only for a moment, to forget the crisis.

Two of our greatest presidents made ample use of humor. Abraham Lincoln was an inveterate storyteller, and he loved regaling his friends and associates with stories he had picked up from his days as a circuit rider lawyer in backwoods Illinois. The burdens of the Civil War did not stop him from indulging in humor.

Franklin Roosevelt loved good stories, as well as gossip. His daily routine was to mix cocktails for his guests at 6 p.m. After they were made, the group would relax a bit and indulge in light-hearted chatter. It was a tonic for the enormity of the Depression and later the Second World War.

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Humor now

Humor is especially warranted now. "Humor lightens one's burdens, inspires hope, and keeps us focused and alert in difficult times," says Smith, who teaches a psychology of humor course at Springfield College in Massachusetts. "With so much power to heal and renew, the ability to laugh easily and frequently is a tremendous resource in confronting any disruption in our life. Humor It is a wonderful diversion that brings positive feelings and emotions."

And leaders need to loosen up. With access to the internet, sources of humor are only a click away. "You can watch clips of funny comedians, or sitcoms," says Smith. "Call up a friend and spend time laughing with him or her on the phone."

According to Smith, the best kind of humor at work is the type that "reminds [us] that we cannot take life too seriously. It is important to remember to laugh at things that happen in everyday life."

Great quips from a great man

One leader who was not above poking fun at himself was Winston Churchill, who was present at many of Roosevelt cocktail hours, and in fact, complained that he didn't like the way the president made them. Churchill was a great raconteur, as well as a gifted quipster. Consider these three:

"In the course of my life, I have often had to eat my words, and I must confess that I have always found it a wholesome diet."

*"Personally, I'm always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught."
"I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter."*

A leader who tells jokes on himself is one who demonstrates a kind of vulnerability that encourages followers to see the real person behind the title. It positions the leader if not exactly one of us, then one close to us. And now that so many employees are working from home, a leader who can apply humor is insightful and resourceful.