LEADING WITH GRACE DURING THE TIME OF A PANDEMIC – TEN TIPS ON NAVIGATING THIS CRISIS IN A MORE ENLIGHTENED WAY by Fiona Campbell

1. PAUSE

   How are you responding to this time of disruption? What assumptions are you holding that are driving this behavior?

   Stepping back to notice what you are feeling, and being curious about what is causing these feelings can help you to understand what is driving your responses to certain situations. With awareness you can choose the behavior that is going to serve you, and others, more effectively.

   In times of crisis we often respond to emotion and feelings by using knee jerk reactions as a way to quickly "deal" with the situation, especially when we have many competing demands on our time. However, we can then regret the response we chose and spend (unproductive) time dealing with the aftermath. Instead, and what may seem counter-intuitive, we need to slow down in order to respond with wisdom. As Victor Fankl once said, "…between **stimulus and response** there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our **response**. In our **response** lies our growth and our freedom."

2. BREATHE

   The power of breath is underestimated. Breathing deeply (and holding the exhale for longer than the inhale) has a calming effect on the sympathetic nervous system. It reduces the amount of cortisol and adrenaline in our blood, calms the heart rate and mitigates the impact of going into fight / flight mode (where our ability to think strategically is compromised). By taking even a

few deep breaths we can alter our physiology, which impacts our emotions and thought patterns, and therefore our behavior. So, the quality of our breath is directly correlated to the choices we make, and the impact we have.

Ask yourself: Are you generally breathing with short shallow breaths, or do you stop to take deep lung filling inhalations? Today, we have multiple options that can serve as a useful reminder to breathe deeply such as Apple Watches and Fit Bits that have breathing 'functions', and mindfulness apps (Calm, Journey, Headspace to name a few). Incorporating a ritual into your daily routine to take a few deep breaths whether it is when you wake up, when you step outside, or before your next virtual meeting can make a difference to your stress levels and therefore your impact as a leader.

3. RETREAT and REFLECT

Take this time of self-isolation and physical distancing to create space. Regular daily activities for many of us have been halted. Time spent commuting, driving, running errands is now extra time that we have IF we don't fill it. Taking advantage of being at home and finding a space in silence to reflect (maybe before the kids are up or after they go to bed if you have children at home) will help you be more present. Being present means being more alert, self-aware, grounded and therefore more resourceful.

Ensuring that life isn't being taken over by online meetings, by having a time in the day for just being, gives a chance for your brain to sync into a different frequency allowing for more creative thoughts and ideas to emerge. Going for walks, watching nature or listening to music allows us to mentally switch off helping the decision-making part of the brain to rest (the frontal lobe). Notice the sensations, intuitive feelings, and ideas wanting to emerge when you are not 'busy'. Capture or journal them. This is internal wisdom that you are giving a voice to when you stop and listen to what is wanting to be said. This space also gives rise to thoughts of inspiration for the future we want to create as leaders.

4. BOUNDARIES

In the world of virtual working, where all the physical boundaries of the traditional office and commuting journeys are now removed, it is critical we establish boundaries for how we work at home. Our lives can quickly turn into one long Zoom call, Skype meeting or CISCO webex if we are not careful. Setting the tone for our teams to establish new norms such as having only 45 min calls rather than 60 mins to allow a bio break before the next call starts, and blocking out lunch with the family or time for exercise during the day is important. Taking some calls while on a walk rather than being on camera all day can help with screen fatigue and concentration. Establishing these new parameters as a leader gives permission for others to do the same, which will make everyone's life easier as we start to respect each other's needs for balance.

We also have a new boundary to manage: the physical boundary of the computer screen as the only way to engage with others during this crisis. Before, we were used to relating to one another through body language, eye contact, and sharing physical space. In communication,

words on their own only account for 7% of the message. Body language and voice expression make up the other 93% (Albert Mehrabian, 1964). Therefore, we have to work even harder to read what each other are conveying across the screen. Creating an atmosphere where we can relate to one another more personally is one way of connecting relationally with people. For example, why not show your team workers your home office / working space / mini tour of where you are staying to create a sense of personal connection.

5. TEAM CULTURE

In times of crisis people want more information and often demand more attention, which can be exasperating when none of us have the answers. As a leader you are managing a duality of showing empathy when others are fearful, whilst simultaneously building their confidence to help them step up into their own leadership. Helping them to trust their intuition and take responsibility will give them a greater sense of opportunity that this period is creating for personal growth.

How you are leading yourself in this current climate sets the tone for others, so pay attention to the hours you are working, the time of day you send emails, and whether you model taking regular breaks that recharge your energy.

Leaders create culture, and it is even more important in a pandemic to have honest dialogue, open communication channels and transparency. Leaders admitting they don't have all the answers, but are committed to getting through this with grace demonstrates humility. This builds trust, which in turn builds relationships. Relationships are a motivator and contribute to people feeling engaged; knowing that you are not alone as you navigate this new world allows people to harness their resourcefulness as they embrace new ways of working, and adopting new technologies. Together.

6. SLEEP

Lack of sleep (consistently less than 7 hours a night) can contribute to feelings of anxiety and depression; and it seriously compromises our immune systems. It also deprives us of the rest and repair our bodies need in order to function with energy, clarity and positivity the following day. For most of the population going to bed by 10pm ensures that we get our full quota of deep restorative sleep cycles. Limiting TV or screen time before bed to prioritize your quality of sleep can be one of the biggest gifts you can give yourself*.

This can be challenging when many of us are craving to know the latest news on the pandemic. However, notice if this is a habit that is feeding our craving for information (not always necessary or valuable) and if it is getting in the way of a more nourishing ritual that you could give yourself. It is hard to think creatively or to be fully present (aware, focused, grounded) when we are tired. Our automated responses kick in, which may lead to behavior you otherwise wouldn't have chosen if you were feeling more rested.

*For more information on understanding the impact of sleep on our lives I highly recommend the book from Matthew Walker: Why We Sleep published by Penguin, UK 2017.

7. PURPOSE

Reconnecting to your values and sense of purpose is not only helpful to center yourself in this time of uncertainty, but also can help position you as the type of leader you want to be, especially coming out of this crisis. We need to adapt and be agile, but leaders who are also authentic and rooted in values and principles are those who inspire trust and are followed.

Embracing this time of ambiguity to give thought to 'Who you Are' and 'What your Purpose is' will help you position yourself to lead in a way that feels aligned, connected and inspired. Use this time of disruption to reflect on what's important and authentic to you. Identify those moments in life that had the greatest impact on you, moments that defined your character and have contributed to 'who you are', including what you have learnt about yourself during the pandemic. Also try naming your strengths, your passions, what gives you meaning and where you see the opportunities lie in a Venn type diagram (known as "Ikigai" or "reason for being" in Japanese). Where all four come together is your unique sweet spot as a leader.

8. COMPASSION

People are responding to this time of crisis in different ways, and inevitably some are more fearful than others. Suspending judgement, staying open to how others make sense of their reality, and meeting them with compassion paves the way to a more generative human outcome. Acceptance and love opens us up to connect with each other; we have all seen the kindness and community spirit that has been the upside of COVID19. This positivity allows us as human beings to operate at our highest potential, where innovation flows creating a future that we are excited to be a part of.

9. TRUTH

In a world where information is viral what we share via social media and with others is a responsibility that we all bear. Checking our sources and ensuring that we trust what we send out is a duty shared by everyone.

As a leader, what is the truth that you want to speak? Many will shy away from speaking that which deep down they know to be true, for fear of the impact it may have or perceived risks. How can your truth be told in such a way that does not alienate, but rather embraces others. A Buddhist monk once told me we only should speak if it is True, Necessary and Kind ("Tough Love"). What would it be like to practice applying these principles for even one day in all of your interactions?

Old rules and previous norms no longer apply. The corona virus has thrown all this up in the air creating a gap for something new to happen. Now is your chance to seize this opportunity to step into the leadership you feel we need now, and post COVID19.

10. LETTING GO

Traditional patterns of thought will not solve future problems. Fighting this current time with outdated paradigms creates stress and frustration. Surrendering to where we are: the state of our balance sheets, reduced work flow, disappearing pipelines of activity and noticing instead the opportunity for growth, adaptation and transcendence that is presented will enable us to evolve. We have the inner resources to get us through this, we just need to listen and trust them.

Developing mindfulness rituals, staying open and connected, engaging in compassionate generative dialogue and letting our values guide us can help us to let go of restrictive belief systems. This in turn frees us up to grow, and to express our best possible version of ourselves as we co-create a future we want for generations to come.