

# LEADING THROUGH CRISIS:

## Part 2: 15 Tips for Creating a Path Forward

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APRIL 2020

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A little over a month ago, we presented a framework for nonprofit leaders to consider as they dealt with the immediate implications of COVID-19 and the uncertainties that were ahead. We promised to keep searching alongside you for answers. While so much remains unknown, what does seem clear is a need for us to begin expanding our frame; moving from solely a focus on managing (a crisis) to ensuring we are also leading our teams and organizations into the future.

Before we go any further, we want to salute those of you that have spent the last six weeks directly on the front lines. Your service, commitment and sacrifice in these times is nothing short of amazing. We see you! Still, we recognize that many others have not been as directly involved and are wondering what happens next...in your organization, across the sector, around the world. While we hope the thoughts in our initial piece continue to ring true, and while social distancing is still the order of the day, we collectively believe it is time to be thinking more about how we can all prepare our organizations for the future. Consider these 15 tips a starting point for those conversations.

- 1 Cast vision.** Planning is hard in the best of times; it is nearly impossible at this time, but it is arguably a leaders' top priority. Give your board, staff and stakeholders something to see, even if it is imperfect. What do things look like today, a week out, three months out, a year out?
- 2 Leaders must lead.** Leadership is a condition of opportunity and circumstance, not limited to title. Don't make these decisions alone—get all the good ideas on the table by creating an atmosphere where thought leaders can emerge throughout your organization.
- 3 Include diverse perspectives as you navigate the current situation.** Be purposeful in engaging team members, and other stakeholders, who have different experiences, interests, and challenges.
- 4 Challenge assumptions and ask difficult questions.** What if we can't gather in person for the foreseeable future? What if we can't serve youth/families/the community in the ways we have in the past? How does our office environment look different if large numbers of the team continue working from home?
- 5 Adapt and plan, then do it again.** Make the uncertainty a little less cloudy by considering multiple scenarios. Particularly for the major decisions with the biggest impact on your clients, staff, and organization, come up with a Plan A, B & C. Identify how and when you will know it is time to move to Plan B or C.
- 6 Innovate! Create! Experiment!** Doing what we've done in the past to "right the ship" during times of disruption may be a good starting point, but it is insufficient. This is the time for PDSAing – Plan, Do, Study, Act. It isn't business as usual. Continually ask yourself and your staff, "What does *business as unusual* look like?"

- 7 Remain true to your mission and values.** Your organization's mission and values are non-negotiables that guide your decision-making. Now is the time to lean on these as decisions are being made.
- 8 Prioritize self-care for you and everyone in your organization.** The last eight weeks have been incredibly draining—both mentally and physically. The path ahead appears to be equally challenging. Those you serve need your BEST TEAM and your team needs your BEST YOU. Lead by example. Make a self-care plan, encourage your staff to do so as well, and hold each other accountable.
- 9 Celebrate Your Employees.** Your employees need to feel appreciated now more than ever before. Look for the victories—both small and large—and find unique ways to show you care. Have their favorite meal delivered to their house; encourage everyone on the Zoom call to wear birthday hats; feature them on social media.
- 10 Overcommunicate—internally and externally.** When there is a lack of communication across an organization, frustration, fear and the rumor mill will ensue. Ensure you are communicating with your team and your stakeholders frequently and across a variety of outlets (i.e. Zoom, email, social media, text, one-on-one).
- 11 Don't panic.** It is ok (and appropriate) to show vulnerability in the right moments, but make sure you are projecting calmness and confidence as a rule.
- 12 Think, plan, and communicate in 3s or 5s.** Leaders must (now, more than ever) synthesize. Long narratives with layers of complexity paralyze people in times of crisis.
- 13 Inequities can be heightened during a crisis.** We know this is true in communities across our states. It is true within your organization as well. Make sure your policies and practices don't cause additional barriers and hardships for those already struggling.
- 14 Know your brand.** There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to external messaging in times like these. You must know your brand and decide if/how/when your messaging fits into larger community conversations. Pushing your agenda without acknowledging current realities can make your organization seem disconnected, which will only hurt your brand in the long run.
- 15 Keep a journal.** It doesn't need to be fancy. A few bullet points per day will suffice. Your memories and the lessons you are learning will come in handy down the road.

These tips are not meant to be an inclusive checklist nor the answer to all of your questions, but we do hope they will be helpful. We remain committed to working alongside you to learn and grow together. As we have more to share, we will certainly do so, and at the same time we challenge you to continue sharing what you know—with us and your colleagues—while striving to find more answers for the sector over time.

To view this article online, which was published on April 29, 2020 as part 2 in an ongoing series, visit the Together SC website at [www.together-sc.org/blog](http://www.together-sc.org/blog).

