

BUSINESS IMPACTS OF COVID-19

March 18, 2020

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As the impacts of COVID-19 continue to grow, Rhapsody Strategies held an online call with 38 business Leaders from a cross-section of industries on Tuesday March 17th to discuss the implications of COVID-19 thus far.

The call was comprised of a facilitated discussion led by Rhapsody to gather the perspectives, concerns, insights, practices, and collective wisdom of the group.

The following comments, thoughts, and insights emerged from the candid and open conversation that was held by these Leaders.

LEADERSHIP



- There are many perspectives on how COVID-19 is spreading, what should be done, and what various levels of government are doing. But our focus needs to be on what we as Leaders can control and influence. We should not spend our limited time and energy on things we cannot change.
- As Leaders we need to choose where we focus the attention of our organizations, our teams and ourselves.
- Leaders do not Panic. Leaders do not fan the flames of fear. Leaders bring us together in times of uncertainty.
- This is a time for Leaders to ensure that they are not stuck in old habits. They need to be willing to change and adjust and transform to these circumstances.
- There has been relatively broad support from clients and community members about the decisions that businesses have made to change how they operate and, in some cases, to pause their operations in order to “slow the curve”. No one appears to be responding negatively. In fact, there may be as many posts online from people trying to support organizations as there are about COVID-19 itself.
- It’s important for Leaders to also look longer term to identify ways to prepare themselves for future similar threats to the business, as well as to identify where there are opportunities to change how they operate day-to-day based on what they have learned from this experience.

CORE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES TODAY

- Cash flow
 - Events being postponed and cancelled
 - Challenges of financial forecasting
 - Capacity to continue projects and drive revenue
- Balancing Priorities
 - How to address client needs with employee safety measures
 - Determining whether we should continue operations, postpone activities, or continue to work through this
- Team Members
 - High anxiety levels
 - Impacts on the mental health of employees including their challenges at home
 - Deciding whether or not to lay off staff
 - Maintaining strong connections with staff
 - Concerns about what the longer-term impacts will mean to ongoing employment
 - Communicating effectively with staff
- Clients
 - Dealing with clients concerned with troubling markets



As Leaders, a key question we need to answer is where we put our focus.

I was reminded of this in our call with a client earlier today. We talked about Stephen Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* where he talks about our Circle of Influence and Circle of Concern.

At the heart of his thinking is that Leaders should focus on our Circle of Influence—the things we can genuinely control and change. As we do so, our influence grows and so does our Circle of Concern.

Our job as Leaders is to focus on the things over which we have direct control. To put our energy into the elements we can move. And so we could spend a lot of time focused on what the government could have done or should have done, but all of that is outside of our control.

Today, we need to ask ourselves what we have control over, and put our energy and time and resources into those things.

Focus ... where we can act.

RAISED LEVELS OF ANXIETY

- Staff are concerned about whether they're going to have jobs next week
 - To address these concerns some Leaders are providing regular updates to their team members to keep them informed. It's a reminder that we're all in this together and helps them understand what we're certain about and what questions still remain.
- Maintaining connections in a context of social distancing
 - We know that social distancing is the right thing to do but it creates space between people at a time they feel the need to be more closely connected.
 - We have disrupted people's behaviours around work which are central to their identity and stability.
 - Nothing is flowing normally right now, so whatever can be done to bring stability will be of great benefit.
- Tactics for Reducing Anxiety
 - Regular communications – as much as you can.
 - Addressing staff concerns directly.
 - Help staff understand COVID-19, how it affects us and how we are protecting one another and the community.
 - Send regular updates from public health, provincial and federal governments and other resources.
 - Manage expectations honestly and stay as positive as possible.
 - Be present as Leaders.
 - Appoint a specific "COVID Coordinator" responsible for tracking ongoing developments and communicating them in the organization.



TALKING TO OUR STAFF

The best practice that we're seeing followed is to start conversations with your team sooner than later. For many, the fear already exists. The anxiety is already present. Employees are aware if clients aren't coming in, if revenues are not flowing, if work is slowing down. They're on the front line so they're seeing it first.

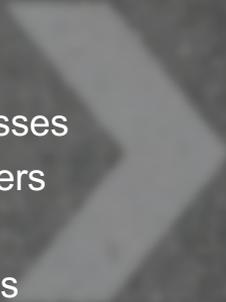
Talking openly and candidly with your team is important, especially if you many need to make major changes in response to the pandemic.

If you end up in a situation where you have to lay people off, very often, the act of laying them off actually reduces anxiety for people – it's the not knowing that is a challenge.

When we can speak openly, we help our team understand. In the absence of our messages, teams will tell their own story which risks being less accurate and could be based in hype or fear.

And if you ultimately decide that you need to change the HR compliment of your organization, your communication must be done with care, openness, and thoughtfulness.

KEY PRIORITIES RIGHT NOW

- Keeping strong relationships with clients
 - Help clients understand we're still there to support them even if we are not able to provide service directly.
 - This could involve discounting or finding creative pricing or payment approaches in order to keep the business running.
 - Offer flexibility wherever we can.
 - Helping clients in these difficult times will not be forgotten. Even the little things go a long way.
 - Draw on support wherever possible
 - Networking Groups
 - Family
 - Business Partner
 - Neighbouring businesses
 - Fellow business owners
 - Accountants
 - Our business coaches
 - Lawyers
 - Peer organizations
 - Suppliers
 - Colleagues in other countries
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We believe that each leader has an important role to play to protect their organizations, their clients and their communities.

That's why we launched the COVID-19 Resource Page to keep you informed with updates that may help you immediately as it relates to the operation of your business.

<https://rhapsodystrategies.com/staying-resilient-during-covid-19/>

On this page you can learn more on how to protect your people, serve your clients, and strengthen your organization. We will continue to update it regularly.

This is not the
time to go it alone.

This is a time to
work together.

To recognize that
we're better and
stronger together.



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